WORKING PRINCIPLES FOR AN ISLAMIC MODEL IN MASS MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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DEDICATION

To

My wonderful wife, Afeefa

Without whom the completion of this work
would have been impossible

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Preface

The International Institute of Islamic Thought is pleased to present to its readers its first book published on Islamic media. Originally, the book was a thesis for which the author was awarded the M.A. degree from the University of Maryland in 1994. Dealing with communication media in the Muslim world, it compares the international Islamic view to contemporary media views. It also presents a set of practical principles upon which a model of Islamic communication through media can be based. The book ends with recommendations and research project proposals for the future.

Research in Islamic media is still in its infancy, especially in English. This book, presented by IIIT to the students of Islamization of knowledge, is a recent contribution to this great civilizational project.

We hope IIIT will continue to present other works in this important field, thereby providing a continuous accumulation of knowledge in communication sciences from an Islamic perspective.

Allah is the provider of success.

International Institute of Islamic Thought
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Chapter 1

Introduction to Research

Since the early 1960s, a revolution has been taking place around the globe, the effects of which shall continue to reverberate well into the next century. Cultures once isolated in remote regions of the Pacific, in sub-Saharan Africa, and on South American mountaintops are now privy to the everyday affairs of people in great metropolises formerly heard about only through stories told by the occasional wayfarer. The airwaves are now flooded with thousands of voices in every conceivable language, belonging to every imaginable culture, ideology and political persuasion. The number of periodicals circulating continues to grow exponentially: for every idea there is now a platform; for every pastime, a magazine; and for every profession, a journal. As technology evolves with every passing hour, so does the pace of this incredible information frenzy.

No aspect of our lives is left untouched by this "mass media explosion." How we perceive ourselves, our reality, and the world we live in is arguably molded and shaped for us by the media. Our fears and dreams; our sense of the acceptable and the unacceptable; and our tastes in art, food and fashion are dictated to us daily by what we read, hear, and see. Indeed, mass media may soon replace traditional institutions such as family, church and school as the primary source of socialization for the young (Rosengren and Reimer 1986, p. 268).

In a free society such as ours, we can at least draw solace from the fact that, for every belief, a counter-belief can be introduced and given the opportunity to grow and flourish. We have a remarkably diverse assortment of choices and alternatives to choose from. Because most of the population

is literate and reasonably well educated, print media (newspapers, magazines and books) are as accessible as non-print media. The availability of so many forms enables a given medium to check and balance the other types. This availability permits individuals to compare, contrast, and filter what they receive, and helps them distinguish between fact and opinion, between the true and the outrageous, between propaganda and reality. One can weigh and judge before submitting to a point of view, or embracing a lifestyle.

In the wake of the introduction and rapid development of mass media methodologies in Western societies, their methods have by and large become the industry standard worldwide. Although many Western media professionals and theorists claim that their established methods and norms are totally objective and value free, there are strong arguments to the contrary. Many of these methodologies are influenced by an underlying value system stemming from a secular-humanist worldview. Such a worldview includes certain assumptions about art and its role in society, and reflects concepts regarding beauty, entertainment, news, and information. These assumptions are reflected in the media that are produced. When these Western, secular-humanist methodologies and concepts are copied and implemented in mass media addressing non-Western cultures, without considering local values and traditions, a clash inevitably occurs.

The effect of this clash is greatest in Third World societies where millions of illiterate and uneducated people tune in to state-run television and radio for long hours. Because they have no access to alternative media, and lack the education and tools necessary to analyze the various messages being received, such people are unable to discern among propaganda; culturally compatible and value re-enforcing messages; and culturally alien, or negative and obtrusive influences. Most Third-World countries are run by autocratic governments that dictate and manipulate media policy. In their drive towards modernization, these regimes often copy wholesale the media models of the Western nations they seek to emulate. Thus, entire cultures, value systems, and national identities are twisted and subverted to conform to the aspirations and political goals of the ruling elite.

Most of the world's Muslim population falls into this category of people whose cultural and religious identity, value system, self-concept, and confidence are being eroded through continuous exposure to media influences rooted in an alien worldview. In pre-revolutionary Iran, disc jockeys from Los Angeles and London were hired to run the broadcast media. Television

consisted mainly of American, Italian, French and English shows. Local productions emphasized national-secular and pre-Islamic items, but never traditional religious and cultural values. This caused such a great degree of alienation, that it played a key role in hastening the 1979 Islamic revolution (Mowlana 1989c, p. 37).

A basic Islamic concept is that God created man and prescribed a certain code of life as the correct one for him. This code, Islam, is more than just a "religion" in the traditional, restricted connotation of the word. Islam does not confine its scope to man's private life, but applies to all aspects of human existence. It provides guidance on all levels—individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international (Ahmad 1980, pp. 28–37). Therefore, any media system addressing Muslim society must be rooted in an Islamic value system in order to maintain Islam's holistic way of life and avoid dissonance.

This research will focus on the effects of imported media models on various elements of Muslim society, and will investigate the extent to which these elements are, or are not, threatened. Subsequently, this book will propose guidelines for countering and alleviating any harmful effects. I will also formulate preliminary principles for an alternative media model, based on assumptions and concepts rooted in an Islamic worldview. The following fundamental questions and assumptions will be examined in the first three chapters:

Chapter 1: What effect do existing mass media models and their programming have on the Muslim populations they serve? In this discussion, particular emphasis will be placed on the media models currently used in addressing Muslim societies, and the influence they have on the identity and perceptions of their audience.

We begin with a brief overview of the current state of mass media in the Muslim world. Colonialism is shown to have had a lasting influence on the languages, media and sociopolitical institutions of Muslim countries. The forms of mass media adopted by post-independence Muslim countries vary according to the political/economic system that has emerged. An analysis is then made of the current state of mass media in the three predominant regime types: autocratic-socialist, autocratic-capitalist and democratic-capitalist. Once the existing framework and structure of mass media in the Muslim world have been outlined, the discussion concentrates on problems arising from the current media systems and their effect on local beliefs, values and culture. Problems are arranged into four key categories: those spe-

cific to the commercial media models, specific to the ideology of the media profession, specific to the television and radio industries, and specific to the flow of news. The effects on the local culture of imported programming, alien values, consumerism, and an elitist orientation will also be examined.

Chapter 2: What is meant by the terms "Islamic worldview" and "Islamic culture," and what are their underlying philosophical and ideological principles? What are the Islamic concepts regarding media, and their uses and methods? For this stage of the research, I have developed the groundwork and ideological guidelines for an Islamic mass media model. Mass media concepts are deduced from traditional sources of Islamic knowledge and related to the overall Islamic worldview. These sources primarily include the Qur'an (the divinely revealed Book of guidance for all Muslims), and the practices and sayings of the Prophet, Muhammad. Examination of these sources will clarify what the Islamic world-view is regarding the role of man in society, the underlying purpose of the media and communication, and the means by which this purpose can be achieved. Then, through further analysis, I will construct a methodology and ethical code particular to an Islamic media model.

Once the Islamic worldview is clarified with regard to the media and their use, content, purposes, tools, philosophy and methodologies, it will be possible in the following chapter to identify a set of guidelines and criteria by which to measure and produce media suitable for Muslim populations.

Chapter 3: How do the concepts outlined in the previous chapter apply, or adapt, to today's media requirements? What critical elements and conventions in mass media production need to be analyzed and re-evaluated from an Islamic perspective? What would an Islamic methodology be with regard to these particular elements?

In this chapter, I will formulate working principles for an alternative Islamic model for mass media. Such a model would provide viable mass communication to Muslim populations while avoiding the problems caused by imported mass media methods. The mass media concepts previously deduced from the traditional sources of Islamic knowledge are woven together to determine a shape and form for Islamic mass media. The following elements of mass media are specifically discussed from an Islamic perspective: aesthetics, free speech, the media professional, the media audience and, finally, the functional and structural elements involved in a media model. Entertainment and news programming are dealt with from an Islamic point of view, as are issues such as media regulation, economics

and ownership. The conclusions arrived at through this analysis are proposed as working principles for an alternative Islamic model for the mass media. These principles, hopefully, will serve as guidelines for further research towards constructing a complete and coherent Islamic media model.

The scope of this study will be confined to those elements of the mass media that are readily available to, and directly affect, the majority of Third-World populations—i.e., primarily the television and radio industries. I have excluded the film, recording and publishing industries from the present discussion except where they are particularly relevant. Also, the limited extent of this study would preclude any speculation regarding possible audience reaction to the proposed media model. Since Muslim audiences are very diverse in their cultures and in their interpretation of Islam as it pertains to daily life, any attempt to gauge or anticipate audience response would necessarily require additional, more focused research and fieldwork.

Because this study primarily addresses Muslim populations, it is important to note that, statistically, Muslims account for nearly one billion of the world's inhabitants. Of this number, 26 percent live in the Indian subcontinent, 17 percent in sub-Saharan Africa, 18 percent in Southeast Asia, 18 percent in the Arab world, 10 percent in Central Asia and China, and 10 percent in the non-Arab Middle East (Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan). Latin America, Europe and Australia have significant numbers as well. The U.S. Muslim population is somewhere between five and seven million (Islamic Text Society 1989, p. 32). In this study, the term Muslim world specifically denotes those countries in which the majority of the population (over 50 percent) is Muslim. This includes almost 50 independent countries, with a combined Muslim population of over 750 million people. These countries are located throughout North and Central Africa, the Middle East, southeastern Europe, and South and Southeast Asia (Rahman 1987, p. 12). All of the countries constituting the Muslim world are considered to be part of the "developing" or "Third" World. This means that they are still in the process of transforming from an agrarian economy to an industrial one.

Skeptics might disagree with the basic premise that the media can operate from within a religious code. This disagreement may be justified if religion is narrowly confined to one's personal life and family, as is the case in secular society. But even in a society such as ours, there still remains an underlying value system that organizes daily life. Although Western values

are not explicitly derived from a particular "religion," they are heavily rooted in the ideology of secular humanism, with strong Judeo-Christian elements.[1] In Muslim society, however, the Islamic faith does not play the restricted role that religion does in the West. Islam is a total way of life that clearly defines how individual, social, political, economic and other facets of life should be ordered and maintained. What is being recommended by this research is the replacement of a secular-humanist value system by an Islamic one as a basis for mass media addressing Muslim audiences.

This type of recommendation might raise concern about Islamic "fundamentalism," or adherence to the principles of the faith in a fanatical or radical manner. "Fundamentalism," as applied to Muslim populations, is a misnomer. It does not refer to an anti-modern or ultra-traditionalist movement, as it does with reference to certain Christian sects that technically exemplify the term. Rather, the Muslim world is undergoing a process of "setting its house in order," which refers to a rejuvenation and reaffirmation of a set of principles and ideals that does not take institutions back in time, but instead reorganizes and revitalizes a society to strengthen its sense of identity (Sajjad 1993, p. 85).

Adherents of this movement claim that this identity is not post-colonial, neo-capitalist, secular-humanist, or anything else of the kind, but rather a clinging to the very roots of what it means to be Muslim. The images in the media of anti-Western demonstrators, of religious leaders exhorting the masses to curse "the Great Satan," and of "terrorist" attempts to force Islamic beliefs down the throats of innocent people are not only incorrect images of this revitalization movement within Islam, but are also starkly opposed to this movement.

Adherents to the revitalization movement instead speak of grassroots attempts at re-integrating faith into daily life. A more appropriate image would be that of children reading verses of the Qur'an in the original Arabic, and being taught the meanings in their own native languages so they can internalize the teachings and implement them in their personal lives. Scholars in the movement hold open debates about the relevance and importance of various theological points. Dialogue is considered vital and

1. Throughout the remainder of this book, the use of the terms "West" or "Western" will interchangeably denote a particular geographical region and, when used in a context alluding to a particular ideology, value-system, or methodology, denote a worldview rooted in secular humanism with Judeo-Christian influences. Although this working definition is simplistic, it is necessary in drawing contrasts with the Islamic worldview.

imperative for a viable Islamic state. Thus, every element of society undergoes a process of scrutiny and discussion before it is accepted as a part of the whole.[2]

In this process, an Islamic media model cannot achieve all of its purported goals by existing solely in and of itself. It must operate from within a total Islamic state. This means that all institutions in a society—political, economic and social—need to be Islamized so that a coherent, holistic Islamic system is in place. Only then can the media model be "plugged in" to play its particular role with any effect. Currently, most Muslim-world institutions remain secular. Therefore, the proposed Muslim media model must remain theoretical, until the right preconditions exist.

2. The question may be raised throughout this book "Whose Islam is being represented here?" One goal of the revitalist movement has been to "internationalize" Islam—Muslims everywhere are reading or hearing the same interpretations of the spiritual sources because of this movement and therefore are more unified in their assessment of what the Islamic dictates are. Also characteristic of the movement's approach is to return to the sources and reinterpret them in light of contemporary challenges and scenarios. This is the tradition and methodology which I subscribe to and therefore utilize in this study.

Chapter 2

Mass Media in the Muslim World

Structure and Form of Mass Media in the Muslim World

In the Third World, mass media development has followed the path of all other forms of development, focusing almost entirely on economics. In their efforts to achieve rapid modernization, many developing countries have adopted advanced technological and complex economic systems for their mass media. Bigness for bigness' sake, a high level of profitability, imitating the media of the industrialized nations, and leaping over intermediate stages of development have characterized this phenomenon. While the poor, small and new states of the Third World sought big media as vehicles to modernity, they were unable to afford the media institutions independently, and were unaware of, or uncaring about, their long-term effects. The result was that miniature replicas of Western or Eastern-bloc print and broadcast operations, designed for more commercialized or more controlled societies, were created (Lent 1979, p. 2). This phenomenon is especially evident in the Muslim regions of the Third World, and is an indirect result of the period of colonialism that these areas underwent.

The Legacy of Colonialism

Most of the countries that constitute the modern-day Muslim world experienced a period of colonial occupation after World War I. The majority of these countries were colonized either by Great Britain (Nigeria, Egypt, Iraq,

Iran, Malaysia) or by France (Tunisia, Algeria). Exceptions include Libya, which was colonized by Italy, and Indonesia, which was colonized by the Netherlands. It was not until the fifties or sixties that these countries gained their independence (al-Faruqi and al-Faruqi 1986, p. 270).

The most significant influence of colonialism remaining after these Muslim countries gained independence is apparent in the institutions constituting their political systems. Many of these countries adopted secular constitutions, thus completely separating the institutions of government from those of religion. In addition, many of the educational, judicial, economic, and mass media institutions were also closely modeled on those of the former occupiers. The new governments hoped that, through replicating the institutions of their former colonizers, modernization would take place more rapidly. In most cases, such models were not particularly suitable for the unique societies they were designed to organize.

During the colonial era, a great number of repressive laws and ordinances were enacted to give the colonizing powers absolute control over the ownership, contents, publication and distribution of all media. Many of these laws, however, continued to be enforced long after independence. Initially, this was done with the excuse of maintaining normalcy during the crucial first years after independence, with the promise of full media freedom soon to follow. But as time went on, successive authorities found it advantageous to keep these restrictions in place, to fall back on in order to increase the coercive capabilities of their political systems (Mujahid 1991, p. 127).

Another legacy left behind by colonial powers is that the language of the colonizer often becomes the lingua franca, or common unifying language, of the country. This is especially the case in countries such as Nigeria and Malaysia, which have many diverse ethnic groups and a wide assortment of languages. Even if the colonizer's language is not the official language, it is still almost certainly spoken by the educated and elite members of society.

In the countries that it occupied, Great Britain encouraged decentralization of broadcasting and newspaper publishing to facilitate the use of mother tongues in the various regions. The French, on the other hand, traditionally emphasized the importation of publications and programming from France, and stressed broadcasting and newspaper publishing in French (Ugboajah and Sobowale 1980, p. 134).

The Post-Colonial Era

As each country gained independence, three major factors usually determined the structure and form of the mass media that eventually developed:

1. The type of government and economic system. After independence, some countries became increasingly autocratic (one-party dictatorship), with Socialist economies. Examples of this are Algeria and Yemen. Other countries became autocratic (usually monarchic), with a free-market economy, like Qatar. Others, such as Pakistan, became democracies with reasonably free markets.
2. The cultural makeup of the population. Many former colonies have diverse populations, with many languages spoken (e.g., Malaysia, Nigeria). Others, like Bahrain, have a homogeneous population of the same ethnic background, and speaking the same language.
3. The relative wealth of the country. The majority of former colonies are very poor in resources, GNP and per capita income. However, some gulf states like the United Arab Emirates are extremely wealthy, and maintain huge annual surpluses in their national economies.

The Mass Media in Autocratic-Socialist Countries

In autocratic-socialist countries (e.g., Iraq, Libya, Syria), where the Socialist media model was adopted, mass media became systematically controlled and owned by party and state, propaganda oriented and authoritarian (Lent 1979, p. 2). In these countries, the government typically operates one or two television stations, and from four to seven radio stations (UNESCO 1975, p. 288). All media employees work for the government, and are expected to serve its interests. Top media executives also serve as leaders of the party in power. Under state ownership, the media are a vehicle for the spread and implementation of government policy. Government control comes before the media publish or broadcast, and the people in control review and heavily censor all copy and programming before it appears (Biagi 1988, p. 14). As a result, propaganda and extremely biased news and information are the norm.

In the Autocratic-Socialist Muslim countries, mass media operations are not economically viable in and of themselves, and must be subsidized by government agencies. Commercial advertising is non-existent, and only ads and commercials for national government-produced products can be found. Such ads do not generate revenue since they are done free for other government agencies. Any alternative broadcasting that may exist in the form

of cross-border transmissions is routinely jammed if deemed threatening to national security.

All broadcast equipment is imported (Ugboajah 1980, p. 145). Almost 30 percent of television programming is also imported, since it is much cheaper to buy than to produce locally. Imported programming consists entirely of apolitical, "harmless" entertainment. Local programming consists mainly of relatively low-cost productions: coverage of national events such as sports competitions, national celebrations, and party news. Any more expensive productions, such as dramas, are usually co-sponsored and co-financed by neighboring countries, or are syndicated to other countries upon completion in order to defray costs (Shaheen 1980, p. 259).

Even though the government incurs substantial costs to produce programming (without recouping anything through advertising revenue), television and radio receivers are sold at prices far below their actual cost so that they (and government propaganda) may be cheap and affordable to all segments of society.

Broadcast equipment is usually state-of-the-art, and the quality of local programming is usually quite good, regular and accessible to all. Distribution mechanisms are well maintained and efficient. However, there is no representation in the mass media of alternative political ideas or parties. Usually, the only culture and language represented is that of the political elite with no exposure for minorities (such as the Kurds of Iraq). Individuals, unless they are party officials, have no way of providing feedback, input or influence over media programming.

The Mass Media in Autocratic-Capitalist Countries

In countries that have an autocratic-capitalist system (e.g., Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar), broadcast operations are also usually controlled by the government due to the high costs involved and for reasons of national security.

Because broadcast operations are financed by the government, there are few commercials, yielding relatively insignificant revenue. Commercials are usually bunched together in blocks of five to ten minutes and can be afforded only by large local or multinational corporations. There are usually two to four such blocks each evening (Shaheen 1980, p. 257). Since people tune out when these blocks begin, this advertising strategy is not economically driven or profit oriented. There are usually one or two television stations and three to five radio stations originating locally (UNESCO 1975,

p. 349). In most instances, however, competing television and radio transmissions can also be picked up from neighboring countries.

Broadcast equipment is state-of-the-art and imported, as is up to 50 percent of all programming. Again, this is cheaper than local productions, which are limited to low-cost coverage of sports and national events, and dramas co-sponsored by or syndicated to neighboring countries (Shaheen 1980, p. 253). Some local programming, even if viewed only by a small audience, is kept in production due to its educational and cultural significance.

Even though much of what is broadcast consists of government propaganda, there is considerably more representation of minority cultures, languages, and political views than in the autocratic-socialist countries. Broadcast and program quality and distribution are usually very good, regular, efficient, and accessible to all in the urban areas. However, television still tends to ignore the needs of the rural majority, remaining irrelevant to the poor and illiterate masses living outside the metropolitan regions (Lent 1979, p. 3).

The Mass Media in Democratic-Capitalist Countries

It is in the democratic countries that the mass media have developed the most—and with much more competition, variety and freedom. Such is the case with Malaysia, Pakistan and Nigeria.

Broadcast media in the wealthier democratic countries (e.g., Malaysia) usually take the form of an oligopoly, since in these wealthier countries investors find it profitable to run such operations. In poorer countries (e.g., Pakistan, Nigeria), television, and most radio, is operated by the government, because it is not economically feasible for investors. Broadcast companies often start as joint venture arrangements between local companies and either foreign firms or the former colonizing government (Shaheen 1980, p. 249). Again, much of the programming is imported since it is cheaper than local production. Local programming consists mainly of news and coverage of sports and national events. Major international sports events such as the World Cup are sponsored by multinational corporations (like Dunhill Tobacco) and are broadcast live via satellite with many commercial inserts for the sponsor (Jefkins 1986, p. 56). Locally produced dramas and entertainment shows are also often entirely sponsored by foreign companies, e.g., 7-Up, Raisin Bran (Shaheen 1980, p. 250). Most television and radio advertising is by the same multinational companies, and encour-

ages the consumption of foreign imports. Multinationals are the only companies that can afford, or that require, national advertising. Some local productions are done as joint efforts with neighboring countries. Also, national studios are sometimes rented out to international production companies or other agencies in order to increase revenues (Shaheen 1980, p. 253).

In the larger countries, such as Nigeria, television and radio are not accessible throughout the country, especially in more distant rural areas where there is no electricity. Normally, the government tries to provide a station in each of the different provinces (Ugboajah 1980, p. 137). In poor locales, receivers are found in coffee shops and town gathering areas where people congregate to listen or watch. Quality is generally poor due to weak signals, the lack of transmitters, broken receivers and the high cost of batteries (Jefkins 1986, p. 63), but substantial variety does exist among the different stations, and most groups are well represented by radio, though less so by television.

In each region of the Muslim world, a few major production nations function as gatekeepers for their area. Lebanon and Egypt have become important television centers in the Middle East. Because these countries acquired the infrastructure and resources of radio broadcasting and film well before their regional neighbors, they were able to develop their television industry more rapidly. Also, because Lebanon and Egypt possessed dubbing capabilities in connection with their film industry, those countries have been able to play a crucial role both as regional producers of television and as gatekeepers for Western programs being distributed throughout the Middle East (Mowlana 1986, p. 51).

Problems with the Current Mass Media in the Muslim World

The Commercial Model

The newly independent Muslim countries that chose the commercial, or Western, media model as their vehicle for modernization adopted a system that depends upon a mass audience, a standardized appeal and a consumer-creating apparatus that attracts advertisement revenue from sponsors. They did not take into account the long, slow development process of the capital-intensive systems of the West. They lacked the capacity to produce or

consume such sophisticated media. As a result, they were forced to accept packages that tied their media to foreign financial sponsorship, and in the process created dependency situations with regard to programming, training and equipment acquisition. In cases where indigenization of the media took place, the only agencies capable of affording the large outlays of capital needed were the local government and political parties, which in turn used the media for their own vested interests (Lent 1979, p. 2). As more pressing economic concerns came into play, the media inevitably fell into a state of stagnation and mediocrity.

In most Muslim countries, there exist additional barriers that greatly inhibit the emergence of full-fledged, market-oriented mass media. There are absolutely no rating services for the various media (Shaheen 1980, p. 261). Also, little data is available regarding audience size. Figures quoted by the broadcasters themselves are usually grossly exaggerated and unverifiable (Jefkins 1986, p. 53). One cannot assume a standard viewer-per-TV ratio. In some tropical countries, watching television can be a communal experience with anywhere from half a dozen to a hundred people watching the same set (Parker 1980, p. 81). The demographics of broadcast audiences can only be guessed at, and usually they are mainly limited to the 20- to 40-year-old age group (Jefkins 1986, p. 66).

Another barrier concerns advertising. Advertisement rates are set in a very haphazard manner, especially with government-owned media. Governments usually do not encourage advertisements in their broadcast or print operations. This causes rates to be unaffordable by smaller companies. In non-government-owned media, rates are set according to what the competition is charging, even if it means a loss for the publisher. Attitudes regarding advertisements are usually very traditional, and inhibit the growth of this marketing method. According to Frank Jefkins, third-world businessmen are hesitant to advertise because they see the cost of advertising as coming out of their profits rather than budgeting it as part of their product's production cost. In their world, quick sales and quick profits are the norm, and the marketplace or bazaar is the traditional place of sale. Advertising seems a strange and alien aid to selling. It requires forward planning, forecasting of sales, and investment in future returns. All of these concepts are difficult for the traditional businessman to grasp (Jefkins 1986, p. 46).

For many readers and viewers in the Muslim world, advertisements tend to arouse suspicion and skepticism. Ads are considered a foreign and un-

conventional method of selling and are regarded with widespread distrust. In developing Muslim countries, ads are generally either too brief or banal or, on the other hand, make assertions that are overly blatant in tone, with too much emphasis on exaggerated and emotional claims (Zuberi 1991, p. 82). There are no laws or regulations governing truthfulness in ads. Thus, the credibility of all ads is quickly thrown into doubt, even those that attempt to be truthful.

Often, what is advertised is beyond the meager means of most of the population. In Indonesia, television advertisements were banned for a few years during a period of economic recession because they unrealistically raised the expectations of viewers (Jefkins 1986, p. 64). Ultimately, this disparity between what is seen and what is affordable leads the poor to view ads resentfully as an unnecessary evil practiced by big, wealthy companies.

Professional Ideology

A corollary to the extension of mass media to Muslim societies has been the exportation of Western professional norms, standards and methodologies to run the media systems. Mass media training, education and research are often taught to Muslim media professionals in the developed countries themselves, or, if conducted in the Muslim world, such training closely follows the curriculum used in the developed countries. This training is usually done from the developed country's framework, rather than by looking at the indigenous culture, needs and problems (Sennitt 1990, p. 13). As a result, most media productions in the Muslim World, be they newspaper reports or features, television drama, documentaries or comedy, all closely resemble those produced in the West. This resemblance encompasses, among other things, the overall style that is used, the values that are stressed, and the themes that are explored (Shaheen 1980, p. 251). Conflict has resulted from the incompatibility of imported media norms with the political, cultural and economic realities of Muslim societies. This conflict between traditional behavior and values and the need to establish a professional set of operating norms has led to concern that Third World media organizations need to create standards of professionalism untinged with imported Western ideologies (Bourgault 1986, p. 343).

One conflict arises from the fact that Western media culture is considered to be far more indifferent, or hostile, to religion and to universal values associated with religion than Western society in general. Western media professionals tend to have a predominantly secular outlook. In the United

States, 50 percent of all media professionals proclaim no religious affiliation at all (Schleifer 1986, p. 118). Hostile secular reporters are unable to recognize a religious news story unless it directly intrudes into public domains not usually or exclusively associated with religion. When Muslim-world media were initiated under the influence of colonial powers, they attracted primarily those locals who were already alienated from their own mainstream culture. As a result of this and the adoption of secular professional ideology, present-day Muslim world media professionals have become hostile—perhaps even moreso than their Western counterparts—towards mainstream religious institutions. Issues that can be considered from a religious perspective are instead addressed only from a strictly secular, Western perspective (Schleifer 1986, p. 121). Such an approach marginalizes the cultural significance and the prominent role of religion in Muslim society, and thus inadequately attempts to explain phenomena from an alien and hostile perspective.

Many modes and techniques taught to Muslim-world journalists as modern journalism are inconsistent with a Muslim perspective. Investigative reporting that involves spying and seeking to confirm suspicions is forbidden by Islam, as are slander and the spreading of stories, albeit true, that injure the feeling and honor of individuals. The core notions of Western journalism are that the public has the "right to know," and that "nothing is sacred." This attitude justifies the invasion of privacy, the appeal to idle curiosity, the appeal to a sovereign "public opinion," however unqualified, and the circulation of discomfiting news that may expose the vices of individuals rather than cover them up. All this runs contrary to the beliefs and values ingrained into the Muslim way of life (Schleifer 1986, p. 122).[3]

Another problem involves mass media research methods. The dominant methods used in Western research are at times useless in Muslim society. Among other things, it is often impossible to conduct interviews in private, and accurate information and audience feedback are difficult to come by due to superstitions and the difficulty of making subjects understand the concept of anonymity (Lent 1979, p. 11). The concept of comments being "on-" or "off-the-record" is not easily understood by a people who for generations have not had the freedom to speak their minds.

Muslim-world media distributors have also been so influenced by their Western counterparts as to have become motivated more by market forces

3. The next chapter is devoted to a more indepth discussion of Islamic media ethics, values and methodology and includes relevant citations from Islamic religious sources.

than by any consideration of cultural consequences. According to a study done in the early eighties, those who work in commercial distribution of entertainment media worldwide have, as their only identifiable "ideology," the urge to sell or air more popular television programs than their competitors (Cantor and Cantor 1986, p. 318).

Elitist Orientation

In some Muslim countries, broadcast media initially planned as vehicles for education have become little more than playthings of the urban elite. In Libya and Iraq, for example, expensive media have been introduced for seemingly frivolous reasons (e.g., the purchase of an SNV—satellite news-gathering vehicle—for live coverage of the dictator's birthday party in his home town). Such events ignore the needs of rural people, who represent the majority of the population (Lent 1979, p. 3). Imported programs, which reflect primarily the lifestyles and entertainment preferences of the elite, are emphasized and shown during peak viewing hours, especially on weekends (Karthigesu 1991, p. 107). Locally produced programs, which have a very wide appeal, but predominantly amongst a rural audience, are marginalized.[4] This is because the urban elite has significantly more purchasing power and political influence than other segments of society.

Imported Programming

In most Muslim countries, because of the huge capital costs involved, only the government can afford to introduce and establish regular television service. But, due to a severe shortage of the capital needed to provide necessary backup materials and services, and the lack of trained technicians, scriptwriters, actors, translators, producers, etc., as well as of appropriate facilities and interpersonal contacts, many governments have found it easier to fill their broadcast days with canned imported programs at a significantly lower cost, rather than to attempt building their own viable production and distribution systems (Mowlana 1986, p. 57).

There exists a one-way flow of predominantly "entertainment" programs from big exporters to the Muslim world. The U.S. is, by far, the heaviest exporter, followed by the U.K. and France (Mowlana 1986, p. 48). Less than two percent of all programs viewed in the U.S. are imported; in

4. The less educated and often poorer rural population find it easier to identify with local stars and themes rather than foreign ones.

France, it is nine percent. By contrast, countries like Tunis and Kuwait import more than half of the programs viewed by their citizens, while Saudi Arabia imports almost 100 percent of its programming (Agee, Ault and Emery 1988, p. 654). Many of the contracts that bind Muslim countries to international program distributors are extremely long-term. If a country sought to change its national media policy, it would find it impossible to do so without facing severe penalties (Karthigesu 1991, p. 104).

An Alternate Reality

Because a significant proportion of the Muslim-world population is rural and illiterate, print media, which traditionally have been the dominant source of news, are inaccessible. As a result, broadcast media have become the overwhelmingly predominant source of information shaping the audience's perception of themselves and of the outside world (Zuberi 1991, p. 81). Since the bulk of what is broadcast is "entertainment" fare, a grossly distorted picture of the real world is conveyed to Muslim audiences. Such a picture is accepted, by many, more readily than reality itself (Haji-Adnan 1991, p. 64). Among other things, television violence induces viewers to perceive their world as a more violent and dangerous place than it really is. Male characters in television programs outnumber female characters three to one, the elderly are greatly under-represented, and the treatment of minorities is more one of mere visibility than of true representation (Mowlana 1986, p. 56). Furthermore, according to Hamid Mowlana, when Muslim societies and cultures are portrayed in imported programming, three motifs usually dominate: social disorder, flawed development and primitivism. The cumulative imagery that emerges depicts disorder and blatant, irrational violence looming large in the Muslim world. The West is portrayed as standing for rationality—science over magic, man over nature. Depiction of corruption in the Muslim world is systematic, with idealization of the primitive, exoticism and barbarism being implicit in many of the portrayals (Mowlana 1986, p. 50).

Alien Values

Another major source of dissonance for Muslim audiences is the set of alien values that are promulgated and glamorized in imported programming. While Islamic "mainstream" values tend to be conservative and tradition-bound, Western "mainstream" values are liberal and "progressive."

A 1991 study of Malaysian television found that imported American programs regularly convey values and messages that inherently contradict local beliefs. Some examples given in the study include the following shows, with the incompatible messages they offer:

Rags to Riches shows children calling their father by his first name and frequently arguing with their parents; adults kissing and making sexual overtures to each other in front of their children; girls wearing tight-fitting, sexy clothes and heavy makeup, with parents showing no disapproval; and parents sneaking out at night to conduct illicit relationships. *Bronx Zoo* depicts teachers having sexual relationships with one another, fighting for free distribution of contraceptives, approving of homosexual relationships, and insisting that religious values and day-to-day life do not mix; and teenage schoolchildren kissing each other and talking openly about seduction and sex. *21 Jump Street* shows people constantly chewing gum, drug abuse among teenagers, seduction scenes suggestive of pornography and the making of a pornographic movie, brotherhood among gangsters under a leader, wanton acts of violence, willful disobedience, and the flouting of police authority. *Family Ties* shows parents encouraging children to date, and watching approvingly amorous exchanges between their children and their lovers. *Different Strokes* has children setting up dates for their parents; *Dallas* shows frequent use of alcohol in all situations; and *L.A. Law* depicts lawyers having sex with clients, with married judges, and even with their own stepmothers (Karthigesu 1991, p. 105). In most imported programs, even the seemingly innocent portrayal of people walking in and out of their houses with their shoes on, is in itself alien and repulsive to traditional audiences.

Even locally produced programming is closely modeled on Western concepts. Muslim-world directors and producers often study and attempt to emulate the style and methods of Hollywood in hopes of achieving similar success and appeal. Little consideration is given to the fact that, though Hollywood's style may be compatible with Western society, it can seem very foreign to Muslim audiences. Thus, Egyptian studios are found adhering to the alien belief that "no subject is off limits," and promoting a cynical worldview in their productions.

Some Egyptian films and series question the sanctity of traditional social institutions such as marriage and family. Many shows deride the role of women as mothers and home-makers, and marginalize the significance of the extended family. Increasingly, women are portrayed as mere sexual

objects to be won, and as being weak and peripheral in a male-dominated world. Individuals' self-worth and value are gauged according to their sexual desirability. God, spirituality, religion and the faithful are at times lampooned, portrayed as corrupt and anti-progressive, or confined to purely ceremonial roles. Man's origin, purpose and fate are depicted as material and circumstantial in nature. Wealth and power are shown as being essential for happiness, and to be sought unconditionally. Cunning, aggressiveness, and the ability to manipulate others are attributes for which one is rewarded, while kindness and selflessness are seen as signs of weakness. A highly individualistic Western sensibility is portrayed in most programming, which is in sharp contrast to the pluralistic and primarily group -oriented Muslim sensibility (Haji-Adnan 1991, pp. 66-71).

In some programs, distinct delineations are made along class and ethnic lines. Such delineation, along with the media's use of non-egalitarian terminology such as "upper class" and "lower class" leads to stereotyping, elitism and classism. Individuals are forced to identify themselves as belonging either to one group or the other.

Constant exposure to this barrage of alien, contradictory values has had a profound effect on Muslim society, especially on younger audiences (Haji-Adnan 1991, p. 64). The traditional cultural and religious identity that holds Muslim society together is eroding and being replaced by a distorted and alien value system (Mowlana 1989a, p. 37). As Muslims embrace these values, they attempt to copy superficial aspects of Western civilization with no regard to the more substantive historical, cultural, economic and political differences. According to Nisar Zuberi, this results in a disintegration of social institutions such as family and community, a loss of identity, and deteriorating self-esteem (Zuberi 1991, p. 80).

In addition to affecting local values, program content also contributes to the creation of a consumerist mind-set. The steady stream of imported and local programs depicting stars leading glamorous lives surrounded by material comforts has led to great demand for luxury and foreign-made products. By acquiring Western clothes, cars, appliances, cosmetics, cigarettes, alcohol (which is forbidden by Islam) and the like, Muslim populations attempt to emulate the glamorous lifestyles they see on television. As a result of the many artificial needs created in the minds of the largely uneducated masses, a taste for instant gratification has set in. This attitude drives individuals to squander much of their income on non-essential products instead of spending it to improve their desperate socioeconomic status

(Karthigesu 1991, p. 108). As larger segments of society eventually despair of ever attaining the glamorous life, depression and hostile feelings towards the affluent take root (Zuberi 1991, p. 80).

Production Conventions

An additional source of confusion involves the visual symbols, imagery, narrative style, metaphors and other production conventions used in imported programming or in local programming modeled after foreign shows. While such concepts might be comprehensible to Western audiences, they are not always transferable to the very different cultures of the Muslim world (Mowlana 1986, p. 55). This causes frustration among viewers due to their inability to make sense of what they are watching. Over time, a depreciation of local and traditional conventions of expression and communication occurs as alien standards replace them.[5]

One common technique of Western productions that causes confusion among viewers is the use of ceilings, walls and other props to convey a sense of confinement. Every action is seen to be tied to a physical, material setting. Islamic sensibility is, however, one of unfettered movement (Moore 1977, 221). A feeling of limitlessness would be conveyed through an absence of solid volumes. There are no ornamental objects or images that have no practical purpose (Kuhnel 1966, p. 26). A mood is created that emphasizes the spiritual over the material. One feels a freedom and ability to communicate with an omniscient Creator, without any barriers or obstacle to give a feeling of entrapment and lack of control over one's destiny. Elements are placed in the top half of a picture to convey a more spiritual, less constrained atmosphere.

While the primary orientation in non-Islamic media is usually vertical, it is horizontal or "earth-bound" in Islam. Sets, props, framing and other visual elements tend toward a horizontal orientation. The vertical aspect is deemphasized because it conveys a feeling of reaching up to the heavens and challenging the divine (Kuhnel 1966, p. 25). Vectors and motion in Western productions are primarily left to right (e.g., the hero is always seen entering from the left of the screen); however, in most Islamic cultures the natural and most harmonious direction of flow is from right to left. This is based on the fact that the Arabic language (the language of the Qur'an) is

5. Some may argue that Muslim viewers should be encouraged to interpret, or trained to decipher imported programs. The issue here, however, is that the locals be directed to produce their *own* programs that can reflect or criticize their *own* world views.

read from right to left (Ali 1983, p. 14). In Islam, movement is full of purpose and has a clear, distinguishable flow because everything is conceived of as moving according to a predetermined divine plan towards its eventual destiny. Haphazard or aimless motion would convey a lack of universal unity.

Since Islam is pluralistic and not individualistic in its orientation, it is through the effort of the entire group that success is seen to be achieved, rather than through the effort of a single hero or star. Therefore, characters and objects should be framed in long shot and medium shot. This gives viewers a feeling of an intricate whole, with every element clearly playing its own respective role. Close-ups are de-emphasized because they highlight individuals and bring their unique traits and personalities into focus.

There is minimum manipulation of the viewer by the director either through the selection of shots, or through the editing, framing or motion. The director is there to provide a window on the action, and it is up to the viewer to interpret events as they happen.

Scheduling Techniques

To sustain and addict viewers, Western scheduling techniques are copied and implemented for local productions. There has been an increase in soap-opera-style dramas with weekly episodes spread over months at a time, complete with summer hiatuses, cliff-hangers, and spinoffs. Local television and film actors are extravagantly promoted and glamorized to fuel the audience's infatuation with and loyalty to the stars and the shows they appear in. Such techniques greatly enhance television's role as a vehicle of escapist relief. Rather than confronting and dealing with the problems that plague their communities, individuals tune in to a different world far removed from theirs.

The table on page 24 presents a typical evening lineup from the television services of three different Muslim countries. A perusal of the schedules illustrates the heavy reliance on imported and "entertainment" programming. In addition, one can only wonder about the effect such apparently haphazard scheduling must have on viewers. For example, the sandwiching of spiritual segments ("Prayer Call") between cartoons and sitcoms suggests a lack of continuity and focus—not only in the programming but perhaps also in the daily lives of viewers. For children watching, "Prayer Call" may become only a distraction until the next entertainment segment appears.

The Flow of News and "The Big Four"

Historically, four major international news agencies concentrated in three Western nations (Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters and Agence France Presse) have gathered and distributed most of the international news published and broadcast in the world. This includes "hard," breaking news and "soft" news features (Schleifer 1986, p. 109).

Sample Evening Television Line-up
For Wednesday, October 18, 1989

Country Time Title Type and Origin
Qatar TV 17:00 Qur'an Religious (Local)
17:10 Prayer Call Religious (Local)
17:25 Popeye Cartoon (USA)
17:50 Animals of Great NW Documentary (USA)
18:15 Duck James Cartoon (USA)
19:05 Prayer Call Religious (Local)
19:20 Doha Live Magazine (Local)
19:50 Miami Vice Crime Series (USA)
20:35 Benson Sitcom (USA)
21:00 Hitchcock Crime Series (USA)
21:25 News in English News (Local)
21:55 PM Magazine Magazine (USA)
22:40 Outlaws Drama Series (USA)
23:30 - Sign Off -

Brunei- 16:45 Finders Keepers Sitcom (USA)
Darussalam 17:10 The Snorkels Sitcom (USA)
TV 17:35 Cosby Show Sitcom (USA)
18:05 Prayer Call Religious (Local)
18:10 Qur'an Religious (Local)
18:20 Life's Most Embarrass Comedy (Local)
18:45 Bimbingan Islam Local
19:00 Berita Dalam Bahasa Local
19:20 Selingan Local
19:35 Windmills of the Gods Drama Series (USA)
20:30 Warta Berita Local
21:35 Tour of Duty Drama Series (USA)
22:25 Don't Wait Up Comedy (UK)
22:50 Sports
23:50 - Sign Off -

Indonesia 17:00 Sesame Street Children (USA)
TV 18:00 Growing Pains Sitcom (USA)
18:30 World News News (Local)
19:00 Local News News (Local)
19:30 WKRP in Cincinnati Sitcom (USA)
20:00 Knight Rider Crime Series (USA)
21:00 News News (Local)
21:30 21 Jump Street Drama Series (USA)
22:30 Sports: Soccer
01:00 - Sign Off -

Source: Malik, Rex. "An Evening With World TV, Wednesday, October 18, 1989," Intermedia 18, no. 2 (1990): pp. 8 - 53.

Since the mid-eighties, these "Big Four" have been transmitting almost 33 million words daily, while the total output of the five next largest agencies is barely 1 million. In the Muslim world, almost 90 percent of all non-local news comes from the Big Four (Nelson 1986, p. 21). The four also provide a large proportion of the international news film used for Muslim-world television (Mowlana 1986, p. 28). Recently, Cable News Network (CNN) has become a major contender in international news, with its up-to-the-minute service available worldwide via satellite.

Due to the predominant role of the Big Four and other western media institutions, most news flow tends to be vertical, from developed countries (north) to developing Muslim countries (south). South to north flow is sig-

nificantly less in volume and often takes the form of "round flow," in which news gathered in the south by northern reporters is transmitted north for processing and editing before it is eventually retransmitted south. There also exists horizontal flow within the north, and substantially less within the Muslim world (Mowlana 1986, p. 60). International radio broadcasting also closely follows this pattern, since it consists mostly of northern stations broadcasting vertically to the south, with some intraregional and circular broadcasting.

Almost all of the national news agencies in the Muslim world are under direct government control (Mowlana 1986, p. 31). Many of these agencies subscribe to one or more of the Big Four services, and then edit and retransmit the material as part of their own news service to hundreds or even thousands of local news outlets (Schleifer 1986, p. 110). These agencies depend on the Big Four not only for general world news, but for news of their own geopolitical regions as well.

One of the crucial factors that restricts the news gathering and dissemination capacity of national agencies in the Muslim World is economics. This affects the quality, quantity, availability, and distribution of news in a number of ways. Affected factors include the number of foreign correspondents; the ability to establish a high-tech infrastructure for news gathering and transmission; the ability to produce news media that can compete successfully with transnational media in advertising, news quality and journalist compensation; the setting of telecommunication tariffs; and the ability of the masses to purchase the resulting news product (Mowlana 1986, p. 39). Political factors also affect both news content and actual flow. As a result, most reports of local and national events end up being highly politicized and biased. Sociocultural differences also restrict the flow of news, as do extra-media factors such as literacy level, population and trade.

Research shows that most international news is "Western-centric" (Schleifer 1986, p. 114). The Big Four news agencies cover the news that they consider interesting to their home audiences. This interest is often correlated with the audiences' wealth, elitism and political potency. These wire services tend to give more frequent coverage to news of conflict in developing nations, as seen from the greater proportionate use of such dispatches by their subscribers (Mowlana 1986, p. 30).

Present coverage of the Muslim world tends to focus on negative or "bad" news—catastrophes, violence and corruption, rather than "developmental" news or educational information (Merril 1979, p. 33). International

news tends to be shallow and oversimplified in that it concentrates on the political leanings of governments rather than providing accurate and comprehensive coverage of conflicts affecting nations and people. International news is also accused of covering the elite rather than the masses, of emphasizing events rather than the factors leading to and causing those events, and of interpreting events without taking into account cultural and religious considerations. A 1982 study found that the tendency towards negative coverage predominant in the Western media has caused the Third World media's coverage of itself and of local news to become primarily negative as well (Mowlana 1986, p. 32). Because northern-dominated news flow distorts information on cultural, political and economic progress in the Muslim world, it has merely led to a massive consumer culture, eroding national identity and sovereignty.

Several studies have concluded that the reason news media tend to reinforce the status quo (the division of the world between high- and low-status nations) and present the world as being more conflict-laden than it actually is, is to emphasize the use of force rather than peaceful solutions (Mowlana 1986, p. 40).

Western news sources also tend to employ a style of metaphor, description, and reasoning that reflects their cultures' dominant values. By framing public issues in certain ways, they reinforce selected socioeconomic norms (Nelson 1986, p. 18). For example, the Western press uses metaphors such as health and recovery to describe the capitalist economy. Such an organic image legitimatizes the concept of economic interdependence. Economic problems are described in terms of a systemic malfunction. If blockages to circulation or distribution were removed, the economic body would be healthy and grow, and so forth. This stress on the free flow of goods corresponds to the principle of laissez-faire economics. Thus, this concept of a world economic body elicits a strong emotional identification. Socialist news sources describe the economy as a crumbling structure with an unstable foundation. Problems are structural in nature rather than organic (Nelson 1986, p. 19).

The media's repeated use of certain metaphors and styles creates a coherence in perspective, ideology and concepts of appropriate action. The ideological bent of a particular news source may have little significance where various choices are available. But when alternatives are limited or non-existent, or state controlled, as is the case in the Muslim world, where an overwhelming amount of non-local news comes from the Big Four, a subtle

form of ideological aggression takes place (Lent 1979, p. 6). Differing perspectives have far less chance of being represented in Muslim countries, particularly when even news originating in the Muslim world is sent to centers in the West for editing before being transmitted back for distribution (Nelson 1986, p. 22).

This constant exposure to news that is biased against and ideologically different from local values, and from Islamic beliefs and customs, inevitably leads to the breakdown and disintegration of the institutions that have traditionally held society together. Such a breakdown is accompanied by an erosion of self-esteem within Muslim societies, and a feeling of inferiority with respect to the developed world. Also, such biases in Western-originated international news, and the incorporation of similar biases into local news by Western-trained media personnel, make it difficult for Muslim populations to form a realistic and coherent assessment of themselves and their situation. And without such an assessment, they become incapable of understanding, and acting on, issues that directly affect their lives and well-being.

International Radio Broadcasting

A problem peculiar to radio has been the steady increase in international broadcasting (i.e., broadcasting intended, either exclusively or in part, for audiences outside the frontiers of the country in which the broadcast originates), enhanced by the introduction of satellites broadcasting super-high-frequency transmissions that are of higher quality, and more difficult to jam, than other frequencies (Agee, Ault and Emery 1988, p. 566). Voice of America (VOA), a service of the U.S. Government, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) both cover the entire Muslim world with their multi-lingual broadcast services. They are tuned in to by millions of listeners daily. The main purpose of these transmissions is usually for propaganda and public diplomacy (Mowlana 1986, p. 61). In times of war and conflict, these services are also used to conduct psychological warfare against hostile regimes. During the Gulf War, Iraqi Kurds and Shi'a were repeatedly urged over the radio to overthrow their government. Some international broadcasting, moreover, is religious and evangelical in nature. Religious broadcasters include Radio Vatican, with transmissions in 30 languages, and Transworld,broadcasting in 70 languages.

Many of the poorer Muslim countries are technologically unable to counter such radio programming from the more powerful international

broadcasters or jam their transmissions. This has undermined what modest efforts some of these countries have made to promote local culture and traditions. As a result, there is a recorded decline in programs broadcast in minority languages and to minority cultures, which has led to serious concern over the potential homogenization of language and culture (Mowlana 1986, p. 55). Also, audiences tend to regard international broadcasts (propaganda and all) as more credible than local broadcasts, which serves further to marginalize local efforts.

Conclusion

Among media scholars there is general concern that Third-World societies need to create alternative media models untinged with imported Western values and ideologies (Bourgault 1986, p. 344). Due to the threat of cultural imperialism, neither the dominant Western model nor the Socialist model for media infrastructures is sufficient to meet the unique communication needs of developing countries. Developing countries must develop their own national communication policies, striving for more control of all sectors so as to further their developmental goals, reassert their cultural sovereignty, and protect their cultural heritage (Mowlana 1983, p.167). The remainder of this study will outline some basic principles that can serve as a foundation for the construction of viable alternative media models compatible with Muslim culture and values.

Chapter 3

The Islamic Worldview and Contemporary Mass Media Concepts

An Islamic Worldview

A Complete Way of Life

In Arabic, *Islām* comes from the same verbal root as *salām*, meaning peace. As a faith, Islam guides its followers to achieve real peace of body and mind through submission and surrender to God. A basic Islamic concept is that the entire universe was created by God, and He alone sustains it. He created man, and prescribed a certain code of life as the correct one for him, but He has at the same time given man freedom of choice as to whether or not to follow that code. This code makes Islam more than just a "religion" in the traditional meaning of the word. To Muslims, Islam is a complete *din*, a way of life. It does not confine its scope to man's private life, but applies to all aspects of human existence. Islam provides guidance at all levels—individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international (Ahmad 1980, pp. 28–37).

Central to the Islamic faith is the concept of *tawḥīd*, which signifies unity, coherence, and harmony among God, humans and all other parts of the universe. There is only one omnipotent Creator, who is also the planner who controls the universe and everything in it. The stars, the seasons, and all of nature proceed according to His flawless plan, in total harmony and integration. *Tawḥīd* also means that all men are the creation of one God, i.e., they are all equal. This principle disallows any right of sovereignty and

guardianship over human society by anyone except God. *Tawḥīd* establishes that there exists a purpose in creation, and that mankind is liberated from bondage and servitude to any entity but God (Mowlana 1989b, p. 141).

Another significant aspect of Islam is the belief that God has revealed His guidance through prophets, and that Muhammad was the last and final prophet. To believe in a prophet means to believe in his message, to accept the laws that he gave, and to follow the code of conduct that he taught.

The Role of Man in Society

Islam teaches that God is the Creator, the Sovereign, and exalts man to the noble and dignified position of being God's trustee (*khalifa* in Arabic) on earth. Man's life is thus endowed with a lofty purpose—to establish an order wherein equity, justice, peace and prosperity reign supreme.

Islam establishes a balance between individualism and collectivism. It believes in the individual personality of man and holds everyone personally accountable to God. It guarantees the fundamental rights of the individual and does not tolerate tampering with them. It makes the proper development of the personality of man one of the prime objectives of its educational policy. Religion in the West is a private affair for the citizen, whereas in Islam, religion is a public affair. Islam does not, however, subscribe to the view that man must lose his individuality in society or in the state (Ahmad 1980, p. 38). The collective therefore becomes a society of individuals capable of and willing to fulfill the purpose of humankind as *khalifa*.

Media Theory and Islamic Tradition[6]

Islam derives its principles and tenets from two major sources: the Qur'an—scripture revealed by God to Prophet Muhammad—and the

6. The following discussion on media and their relationship to Islamic value systems is a joining of two approaches. First, primary sources and documents have been utilized and interpreted to present the ideas given. Second, I have drawn on articles about media and Islam that have only recently appeared in traditional academic media journals. These sources indulge in lengthy discussions that touch on some of the topics I present here. But as my focus in this book is the development of practical working principles for Muslim media professionals, I have not attempted exhaustive excursions into the topics. For further investigation see the bibliography for references.

Sunnah—the actions of, and traditions about, the Prophet. The two sources are used together. The Qur'an presents historical, spiritual and material arguments for the edification of mankind, while the Sunnah becomes the Qur'an in action, i.e., the practical, implementable dimension of what God has revealed becomes apparent through the example of the Prophet. From these sources, all aspects of society—political, social, economic, cultural—are guided. As societies undergo changes and developments of various types, Muslim scholars have the prerogative to re-evaluate and debate the issues again. Such debates must be based on a balanced analysis of the original two sources in light of the demands of contemporary society.[7]

Realizing that these sources are the backbone of Muslim society, the discussion proceeds to what, in the context of the original sources, can be interpreted as applying to the media and their components. I begin with an investigation of what, in Islam, the purpose is in regard to all disciplines. From this generic definition of purpose, I extrapolate a more media-specific one. Further, a look into the two primary sources reveals clues as to what methodology is most effective in serving the purposes stated by these sources. Next, I examine the issue of ethics. In what manner must an individual within the media model approach his or her field? Are there some limitations or specific practices to encourage?

Remembrance as Purpose

In the Qur'anic model, which Muslims consider to be the ideal blueprint for life, every member of society is endowed with a set of fundamental objectives that constitute the very purpose behind existence. These basic objectives remain constant whatever activity the Muslim engages in, be it teaching, trading or engaging in the media.

Foremost among these objectives is *remembrance* of the Creator (*dhikr* in Arabic). The Qur'an states:[8]

7. In Islam there is no hierarchy of ordained clergy. An *imam* is the leader of prayers and can be any individual who has sufficient knowledge of the Qur'an. Through a process called *ijtihad*—the attempt at reasoning and interpreting—every Muslim is required to constantly remain in touch with the two sources (Qur'an and Sunnah). Although jurists and scholars of Islamic law, *shari'ah*, are considered learned in the subjects, they alone do not make the judgments by which the Muslim community, the *ummah*, is to exclusively behave.

8. From here forward, when verses from the Qur'an are cited, the quote will be followed by the chapter and verse numbers. For consistency, all such citations come from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*. The quotes from the

> O mankind! Reverence your guardian Lord... (4:1)
>
> ...for without doubt in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction. (13:28)
>
> Say: He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him (Chapter 112)

Through remembrance and consciousness of the Creator, Islam instills in each individual and each endeavor a sense of accountability, an awareness of the presence of a greater force. Remembrance of God is therefore the primary purpose behind man's existence and every action that he attempts.

The mass media have arguably become a potent means of influencing the thoughts and perceptions of society. Therefore, understandably, their purposes and goals deserve close scrutiny. In authoritarian systems, the purpose of the media is to win popular support and loyalty to the regime. In commercial systems, mass media are expected to bring in a reasonable return on investment. In an Islamic system, the content of media, according to the principle of tawhid, must not be primarily geared towards the creation and perpetuation of political, social, economic or cultural idols; nor should the media be allowed to promote a cult of personality (Mowlana 1989b, p. 141). Under Islam, mass media can be legitimate only if they embrace and propound the same purpose that all Muslims are required to live for. Thus, their mission must be defined by and directly linked to the Qur'anic mandate to remember God. Through the transmission of news, knowledge and entertainment, Islamic mass media would consistently direct society towards its fundamental purpose, and remind it of its accountability. The goal must be a "higher" one from which all of society benefits—the greatest benefit being aiding members in remembering their Creator.[9]

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sunnah are taken from *Riyadh-Us-Saleheen* by Yahya bin Sharaf al-Nawawi and are represented by the letters "RS" and the number assigned to the particular saying in the book.

9. It must be mentioned here that commercialism in and of itself is not condemned by Islam. The idea of marketing and profit is not antithetical to the principles of the Islamic model; after all, these elements are part of a commercial society. The critique here concerns the need for moderation and that the amount given back be more than the amount taken from society. As Mowlana states, economic, political, intellectual or media institutions should not be centers of amassed power (Mowlana 1989, p. 142).

• *Acknowledgment of attributes*

One method by which Muslims are directed to remember God and practice *dhikr* is through the acknowledgement of the attributes or qualities by which He sustains humankind:

> "...Call in remembrance the benefits (you have received) from God: that so you may prosper." (7:69)

> But the bounty of your Lord—rehearse and proclaim! (93:11)

When relaying good news—times of economic prosperity, peaceful reconciliation, or a decline in crime—Islamic media attribute such good fortune to God and His mercy. "Rehearse and proclaim" urges individuals to speak about the positive happenings taking place in their lives and communities. Accentuating the positive over the negative has an inspiring and motivational effect on others. The media, likewise, should emphasize positive news and images that are psychologically uplifting. Instead of offering a concentrated and depressing barrage of murder and mayhem headlines designed to sell, Islamic media would seek to benefit society by relaying examples of human perseverance and steadfastness.

Likewise, in confronting situations of misfortune—catastrophe, human and economic loss—Muslims are also directed to remember God:

> ...and never give up hope of God's Soothing Mercy: truly no one despairs of God's Soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith. (12:87)

> Tell my servants that I am indeed the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful; (15:49)

> Verily, with every difficulty, there is relief: (94:5)

A Muslim acknowledges that any hardship encountered is not merely a random and arbitrary act of nature but rather something that God has ordained. Because everything is a test from God, Muslims maintain that if they persevere and believe in his mercy, the promised relief is sure to follow. The media, therefore, should remind people of God's mercy through optimistic commentary grounded in reality. News stories or other creative productions could use contemporary examples of equally difficult situations that are being overcome by people's perseverance, and by their trust in God's judgement. Social unrest should not be reported merely as exciting news stories. Rather, media must use a self-imposed moral judgement scale so as not to exacerbate the situation. A recent example of the media's role in such a situation was that of the Los Angeles riots after the Rodney

King beating verdict. For the most part, it appeared as though the media played on people's fears and compounded the situation (pictures of devastation and angry mobs hurling angry words dominated the coverage). Networks and papers competed in presenting the most gruesome and graphic images in order to "serve the truth." An audience watching such news stories might become even more upset simply because what was being seen and understood was a total sense of loss and despair.[10] Islamic news media, in such a situation, would play a soothing and calming role. The discussion would emphasize on-going interracial efforts to address the underlying tensions that brought about such an eruption of violence. Groups earnestly working to bring about calm and understanding would be highlighted, rather than the bands of violent hoodlums.

• *Contemplation of the signs*

Beyond presenting the positive and finding some hope in the devastation, Muslim news media should, as a means of remembering God, draw attention to His magnificence on a more personal, daily basis. This means to reflect on our very surroundings, and the signs of God's creation. The Qur'an puts it this way:

> Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of Night and Day—there are indeed Signs for men of understanding. (3:190)
>
> ...And contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth,... (3:191)
>
> It is We who have set out the Zodiacal Signs in the heavens, and made them fair-seeming to (all) beholders; (15:16)
>
> Do they not reflect in their own minds?... (30:8)

The media could provide opportunities for reflection by presenting on one level documentaries or features about environmental issues—the animal kingdom, astronomical phenomena, discoveries in the natural sciences. Essentially, this would serve the purpose of educating the audience on these issues. Following this, at the next level, through dramas, talk shows, and other presentations, the natural signs could be used as themes and symbols for contemplation and discussion. The individual, without being patron-

10. Informally, acquaintances living in the riot area confirmed that their neighbors were encouraged to participate in activities such as looting only after news stories depicted chaos and a total lack of law enforcement. Even more, potential looters were given good locations and strategies by which to get away with their goods!

ized, would be able to remember , through the signs, how God is significant in his or her own life.

• *"That you may know each other"*

Next, after realizing the bounties and manifestations of God, believers are given the command to contemplate and interact with others around them. A concept crucial to the Islamic way of life is that of the umma, or collective community. This concept transcends national and political boundaries and the notion of the modern nation-state. The concept of community in Islam makes no distinction between public and private; therefore, what is required of the community at large is likewise required of every individual member (Mowlana 1989b, p.144). Specifically, the Qur'an goes on to proclaim that:

> O mankind! We created you from (a single pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (49:13)

As Muslims become more aware of one another and realize it is their duty to seek one another out, they are further enjoined to keep their relations peaceful and harmonious. Again, the Qur'an and Sunnah:

> The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: so make peace and Reconciliation between your two contending brothers; (49:10)

> Make things easy and convenient, and don't make them harsh and difficult. Give cheer and glad tidings and do not create hatred (RS637).

> The Muslims in their mutual love, kindness and compassion, are like the human body, where when one of its parts is in agony the entire body feels the pain both in sleeplessness and fever (RS224).

The media, especially in this day of the "global village," can play a crucial role in fulfilling these mandates. First, accurate portrayals of the "other" give native audiences exposure to cultures and customs different from their own. The "other" is made at least superficially familiar and reachable, while a sense of appreciation for variety in culture is heightened. Secondly, by presenting these peoples as part of a larger whole, the media could create a bond that could be a realization of the commands from the Creator and his Messenger. This bond would be further enhanced by the media drawing parallels among the struggles and successes of various populations to show the universality of all peoples. Muslims also, according to the injunctions above, are required to make peace with one another as well

as to feel the sufferings of other groups. The media should, at the very least, be responsible for making all Muslims aware of situations so that they can fulfill their duties and come to one another's aid.

- *"Enjoining what is good"*

Beyond interacting with one another and gaining appreciation for diversity, another way by which God is remembered is through active affirmation that His laws are maintained for the well-being of humanity. Thus, activism plays a prominent role in the lives of Muslims. The Qur'an, and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, do not allow for inaction for the sake of maintaining some sort of status quo. Islam calls for changes if the status quo in any area less than adequately meets the needs of people or their ability to worship God

> ...Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls). (13:11)
>
> Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong:... (3:104)
>
> You should enjoin virtue and check evil (RS193).
>
> In most of their secret talks there is no good; but if one exhorts to a deed of charity or justice or conciliation between men (secrecy is permissible): to him who does this, seeking the good pleasure of God, We shall soon give a reward of the highest (value). (4:114)
>
> For the worst of beasts in the sight of God are the deaf and the dumb— those who understand not. (8:22)
>
> If anybody amongst you notices something wrong, he should correct it with his own hands, and if he is unable to do so, he should prohibit the same with his tongue (RS184).

The media, therefore, cannot be passive; rather, they have a moral and activist role to play in the uplifting of society—they are, in effect, advocate media. Injustice, fraud, waste, harassment, are all threats against the public welfare, and must be addressed by the media as such. Moral vices—alcoholism, usury, racism—are entirely contradictory to the tenets of Islam, and must be confronted with a clear indication that they are destructive to the fabric of society.

• *Sharing the message*

Finally, as the Muslim becomes an advocate for righteousness, he or she is then encouraged to remember God by sharing His message with all of humanity:

> O messenger! proclaim the (Message) which has been sent to you from your Lord. If you did not, you would not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission.... (5:67)

> Therefore expound openly what you are commanded, and turn away from those who join false gods with God. (15:94)

> And recite (and teach) what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord: none can change His words, and none will you find as a refuge other than Him. (18:27)

> Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to you... (29:45)

> The best among you are those who have learnt the Qur'an and teach it to others (RS993).

> But teach your message: for teaching benefits the Believers. (51:55)

> We have not sent you but as a universal (Messenger) to men... (34:28)

An integral part of practicing *dhikr* (remembrance of God) is reading, reciting, and analyzing the Qur'an. Through the media, audiences can be provided with opportunities to see themes from the Qur'an integrated, for example, into television programs. These opportunities could include straight translation and commentary on selected portions of the Qur'an. Such programs are shown, to a limited extent, in some Islamic countries each Friday, the Islamic holy day. As situations demand, relevant verses of the Qur'an are analyzed and meditated upon so that people may derive inspiration and accord their knowledge, life and desires with it (Ali 1992, p. 998). Another factor in teaching the Qur'an is what in Arabic is called da'wah. Da'wah is the inviting of those who do not know about Islam to learn more about its way of life. The Qur'an concerns itself with da'wa in the following verse, whose theme is reiterated throughout:

> Let there be no compulsion in din (religion):... (2:256)

An example of Islamic media utilizing this concept would be the presentation of aspects of Islam to an audience known to be ignorant of them.

In the end, then, practicing *dhikr* is the sole purpose of mankind, and therefore the purpose and underlying rationale behind any Muslim media

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In the end, then, practicing *dhikr* is the sole purpose of mankind, and therefore the purpose and underlying rationale behind any Muslim media

model. It follows, then, that to fulfill its mission, this abstraction must be accompanied by a systematized and structured approach. My discussion continues with a study of methodology in the Muslim media model.

Methodology

It is important to note that the Qur'an and Sunnah may be viewed in two ways. First, each is a collection of principles and commands which are explicitly stated; this is the content. Secondly, the Qur'an and the Sunnah are in themselves valued for their methodology; they are a form of mass media (Pasha 1993, p. 63).

Here it must be noted that for 1,400 years the Qur'an has remained intact in its original form. The Sunnah, traditions and sayings of the Prophet, has likewise been preserved complete in a set number of volumes. These volumes were compiled shortly after the Prophet's death (in 670 CE), along with the chains of authority upon which the authenticity of their contents rests. Throughout Islamic history, the Qur'an has been memorized by Muslims, studied assiduously at all levels in schools, and in religious study classes, and featured in Islamic art and literature. Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah have been translated into almost every written language. Many million copies of the Qur'an and Sunnah are currently in circulation, with at least one copy in every Muslim household (Pasha 1993, p. 64). The Qur'an itself is referred to daily by every practicing Muslim, either to seek guidance regarding certain issues or merely to fulfill the five daily obligatory prayers. If we analyze the Qur'an in the light of it being itself a form of mass media, it is possible to deduce certain methodologies and structures that convey its message. Many of the methods used can themselves be adopted in structuring a contemporary Islamic mass media model.

• *"In your own tongue"*

It is imperative that media be accessible and part of the native cultural matrix for them to fulfill their stated purposes. The Qur'an relates:

> So have we made (the Qur'an) easy in your own tongue... (19:97)
>
> We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his own people, in order to make (things) clear to them. (14:4)
>
> The holy prophet used to repeat his words thrice so that the same were fully understood (RS696).

> The holy prophet used to talk very clearly and distinctly, so that his audience who listened to him understood the point (RS697).

All the prophets sent throughout history were in essence communicators employing certain methods to convey their message. Most crucial to their methodology (and to that of the Qur'an as well) is the use of the local language. This allowed them to be both relevant and credible to the audiences they addressed. The term "language" in this context not only includes the spoken and written forms of communication but also the use of symbols, traditions, gestures and references peculiar to the local culture. Islamic mass media, therefore, should be understood by all, and should be simple, clear, and neither elitist in orientation nor reflecting foreign styles, concepts or structures—media of the people and for the people. Expanding on this point, the Qur'an states:

> ...See how we explain the Signs by various (symbols); that they may understand. (6:65)

> We have explained (things) in various (ways) in this Qur'an... (17:41)

Not only are things explained in the local "language," but points are illustrated from many different angles. The Qur'an addresses an issue from all points of view, individual and national, by means of stories, parables and figures of speech, and by way of categorical commands (Ali 1992, p. 685).

Logic and reason are used throughout the Qur'an. Derivatives of the word *bayyina*, simultaneously meaning to demonstrate, explain, expound or elucidate, occur regularly (Pasha 1993, p. 68). Arguments are given premises, and conclusions are based on logical steps.

Another manner in which the Qur'an makes its message accessible is indicated by the verses:

> See you not how God sets forth a parable?... (14:24)

> And such are the parables we set forth for mankind, but only those understand them who have Knowledge. (29:43)

In the Qur'an, parables are related to illustrate or convey a particular point. In many instances these parables draw on examples from nature (rain clouds in 2:19–20, a grain of corn in 2:261, light in 24:35–36). Such examples make use of the local "language," and use elements and themes that individuals can relate to and identify with so that the point can hit home. There is a connection made between the daily lives of people and the greater cosmos and purpose. People's daily lives are brought into perspec-

tive and shown to be interconnected with a greater whole, with all proceeding according to God's plan.

In Islamic media, scenes from a drama would reflect familiar images and scenarios. Situations might be presented through creative, symbolic parallels, but would nevertheless deal with practical, real-life issues. Audiences view these presentations first as entertainment, but, because they parallel so strongly their own daily habits, the approaches and resolutions used become relevant and positively internalized. Media, following the Qur'anic example, need to make the connection between daily situations, the resolution of such situations, and their relevance and relation to the larger picture involving all of society, and perhaps all of creation.

• *Tolerance*

Another element crucial to the Qur'an's methodology and approach is the attempt to maintain a level of tolerance towards other ideologies and points of view. The Qur'an states:

> We send the Messengers only to give good news and to warn... (6:48)

> Revile not you those whom they call upon besides God, lest they out of spite revile God in their ignorance... (6:108)

> Say, "I do but warn you according to revelation;..." (21:45)

Even when confronted with some sort of blasphemy, the Qur'an reminds its believers to turn away rather than pursue any fruitless confrontation:

> When you see men engaged in vain discourse about Our Signs, turn away from them unless they turn to a different theme.... (6:68)

Essentially, the role of the prophets and the Qur'an was only to convey the truth as they knew it. They had no mandate to use their influence to condemn other points of view, lifestyles or ideologies. By focusing only on relaying the essence, the Qur'an steered clear of the traditional coercive or condescending course that authoritative texts can lean towards. Thus, the Qur'an remains concrete and relevant throughout.

A similar approach would apply to Islamic media, which could give presentations of "what ought to be" according to Qur'anic guidelines, and also acknowledge "what is" by confronting reality with a balanced view. Media should be neither defensive nor offensive in fulfilling their stated purposes.

> Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it: those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding. (39:18)

This verse may be interpreted to mean that facts are to be presented in as plain a manner as possible and the audience—whose intelligence is acknowledged—is left to form their own opinions. Tolerant media would provide all news and all sides to a story "as is," without exhaustive interpretation. Then, if the media have to provide an interpretation, they can do so only after all sides have been fairly considered. The interpretation chosen should coincide with the media's purposes, stated above.

• *Accountability and thoroughness*

A vital aspect of Muslim belief is that of one's accountability for every action and intention. The Qur'an addresses this issue in various ways, and proclaims that each individual is finally held accountable for his or her deliberate actions.

> The (Qur'an) is indeed the Message, for you and for your people; and soon shall you (all) be brought to account. (43:44)

> But your people reject this, though it is the truth. Say: "Not mine is the responsibility for arranging your affairs; (6:66)

This sense of responsibility, of not allowing any action to be without cause, is fundamental to all Qur'anic precepts. Once this issue of accountability is understood and accepted by Muslims, they try to carry out only those actions that they know to be truthful. The Qur'an stresses this in many instances:

> And cover not Truth with Falsehood, nor conceal the truth when you know (what it is). (2:42)

> We sent down the Qur'an in truth and in truth has it descended:... (17:105)

> And he who brings the truth and he who confirms (and supports) it—such are the men who do right. (39:33)

Ultimately, this heightened desire to ascertain the truth impels the Muslim towards an extremely thorough and meticulous review of every action before it is performed. Again, a reference to the Qur'an:

> Praise be to God, who has sent to his Servant the Book, and has allowed therein no crookedness: (He hath made it) straight (and clear) in order that he may warn (the godless)... (18:1-2)

The Qur'an, therefore, not only presents the truth, but is clear and plain in conveying the truth, while being free of mysteries and ambiguous

expression (Ali 1992, p. 707). Specifically with regard to the verification of facts, the Qur'an states:

> O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what you have done. (49:6)

> Why did they not bring four witnesses to prove it? When they have not brought the witnesses, such men, in the sight of God (stand forth) themselves as liars! (24:13)

To maintain credibility, the media, perhaps more than any other field, depend greatly on their perceived ability to convey accurate and true information. They are held accountable by their audiences should they deviate from this standard. As ideological and moral values change in society, contemporary media adopt the new set of "truths," and champion the new causes. For example, when slavery was an acceptable norm in society, the media generally upheld it as such. And, not so long ago, the rights of "gays" and lesbians were virtually non-existent. Nowadays, however, the media in general uphold the new attitude towards these rights as being inalienable. Islamic media, however, are held accountable to God above and before any other entity, and therefore cannot espouse new causes as they become popular and socially acceptable. Accountability also relates to the very basis of what is portrayed to audiences.

The media have to be meticulous in their research into facts and information; no errors or room for damaging speculation should be allowed. If there is no conclusive proof, nothing should be mentioned or speculated about. In the absence of producing credible sources or proof, those perpetuating unsubstantiated news become themselves guilty of slander. In addition to not having credible sources, contemporary media at times resort to ignoring the possible non-credibility of sources for the sake of expoing some favorite cause. Walter Olson, in discussing the NBC exposé, and subsequent legal trouble for rigging its story, on exploding GM trucks, stated that "It's an ill-kept secret that adversary journalism relies on information from partisan or interested sources." He goes on to say that if a news agency receives a tape or word from a rival company that another company is practicing bad business, the news agency will not take the necessary action to investigate the story fully. News agencies have this type of information dropped into their laps and therefore, according to Olson, do not have to do anything but add "balance in the form of an interview with officials of the target, edited down to a few miserable or evasive-sounding

moments" (Olson 1993). Obviously, this type of advocacy can result in the eventual misleading of the trusting audience, and in a lessened sense of accountability to them.

One final note about credibility is that the media are used in many cases as forecasters or warning systems for situations that may arise in the future. If the media realized that they are an important element in shaping the way policies are made and opinions are based, they would be more conscientious about providing a real service rather than a mixture of half truths for the sake of profit. It is no secret that at times the media are all that is relied on for information on the basis of which real-life decisions are made:

> Here is a Message for mankind: let them take warning therefrom,...Let men of understanding take heed. (14:52)

• *Historical lessons*

Another method used by the Prophet and the Qur'an to convey certain lessons or courses of action is through the historical analysis of past nations and the events that shaped their period. The Qur'an states:

> Such were the towns whose story We (thus) relate unto you:... (7:101)

> Such are some of the stories of the Unseen, which We have revealed unto you: Before this, neither you nor your people knew them... (11:49)

> All that we relate to thee of the stories of the messengers—with it We make firm your heart: in them there comes to you the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe. (11:120)

> There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it—a detailed exposition of all things, and a Guide and a Mercy to any such as believe. (12:111)

> Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the End of those before them (who did evil)?... (47:10)

No society is isolated in time and space; history is a continuum of which we are all a part. The actions and decisions of societies before us have played a crucial part in the shaping of our own worldview. Likewise, our actions will undoubtedly affect generations yet to come. By studying the past, one can observe the cyclical nature of history, and draw lessons from it. Elements that made societies before us great and productive, as well as those that caused downfall and decay, need to be analyzed. The concepts of

"learning from the past" and "history repeats itself" cannot be mere abstractions in an Islamic media model. Again, the purpose of media, as stated earlier, is attained by using historical examples as reminders that man is not the end-all of existence. Media educate the audience about the spirit and the struggle that were a part of historical events. This strengthens the audience's sense of identity, and reaffirms the values upheld by the society. Even romanticized images of the past affect the coming generations by stimulating the feeling of belonging, and of being in a place in time.

Historical themes can be integrated into any of the media, so as to present them as creatively as possible to as diverse audience as possible. Films and dramatizations based on historical situations aid in bringing to life themes that might otherwise seem remote and irrelevant to contemporary audiences.

Ethics

In his discussion on communication ethics, Hamid Mowlana states that since the Enlightenment, the West has gradually separated religion from secular life. This separation left decisions about what is or is not ethical conduct up to the individual conscience. However, this was the case only as long as such conduct did not interfere with the public sense of morality. In Islam, such a separation between the religious and the secular never occurred. Thus, in Islamic society, religion wholly encompasses an individual, so that his or her general conduct is shaped by Islamic socio-religious ethics. In this way, Islamic ethics remained social and religious, while secular ethics became primarily social in nature (Mowlana 1989, p. 139b).

Because Muslims are commanded to subscribe to a purpose with such high standards, it becomes imperative that the individual maintains a compatible code of ethics. The individual must have *taqwa*—conviction on a personal level regarding the purposes and direction in which the encompassing methodology is taking him or her.[11] From such conviction arises an ethical code that enables the individual to implement and facilitate the higher purpose. A survey of the Qur'an and Sunnah provides rudiments for

11. *Taqwa* is considered to be a high level of prophetic self-consciousness. It comes from the individual's spiritual, moral, ethical, and psychological capacity to rise above and become immune to the excessive material desires of the world. Islam assumes that humans are endowed with inherent greatness and dignity and thus capable of acting out of ethical emotions rather than with the sole intention of gaining benefit. In the Islamic tradition, the conduct of any person, be it in politics or journalism, is associated with *taqwa*. Those who do not possess a degree of *taqwa* inevitably face the crisis of illegitimacy (Mowlana 1989, p. 145).

a code general to all professions, from which specific guidelines for the media professional may be extrapolated. These guidelines aim to build a person who will function within the larger group.

• *Seeking knowledge*

Islam addresses the individual with an all-encompassing command—to seek knowledge. The word *'ilm*, Arabic for knowledge, occurs in the Qur'an more than 800 times. Nearly one third of the Qur'an's content extols notions such as reason, reflection, study and travel—all of which can ultimately relate to some sort of media presentation (Sardar 1993, p. 45). In fact, the very first verses revealed to the Prophet Muhammad were concerned with knowledge and reading (Pasha 1993, p. 66):

> Proclaim! (or Read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created... (96:1)

> Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful—He Who taught (the use of) the Pen—taught man that which he knew not. (96:3-5)

Muslims interpret these verses to mean that knowledge, and the pursuit of knowledge, is what the Creator desires of all humankind, so that their very purpose will be fulfilled accurately. Knowledge links an individual to God:

> Those truly fear God, among His servants, who have knowledge:... (35:28)

The Qur'an then goes on in later verses to reiterate the importance of the quest for knowledge, and the idea that there is never a point at which an individual may feel that all is known:

> A Muslim is never satiated in his quest for good knowledge, till it ends in paradise (RS1386).

> God, His angels and all those who live in the heavens and the earth... supplicate for those who instruct people in virtuous knowledge (RS1387).

While the pursuit of knowledge is commendable, the Qur'an and Sunnah nevertheless let it be known that there are limitations on the extent of human understanding and comprehension. Certain areas—God's wisdom or rationale in specific instances, the details of an afterlife—are to be taken on faith and not necessarily on the basis of rationalized premises. We as humans must acknowledge that there exists a greater knowledge that is not confined to our laws of reasoning and understanding. We are not capable

of realizing this knowledge, and must concede that, nevertheless, we can still function properly, and carry out our responsibilities to our Creator. This is the necessary element of faith which accompanies all belief systems:

> And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge; for every act of hearing, or of seeing, or of (feeling in) the heart will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning). (17:36)
>
> That which is lawful is clear and also that which is unlawful is quite clear; and between these two is that which is ambiguous, which most people do not know. One who avoids the doubtful, safeguards his faith and his honor (RS588).
>
> Leave alone that which involves you in doubt, and adhere to that which is free from doubt. For truth is comforting and falsehood is disturbing (RS55).
>
> O you who believe! Ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble.... (5:101)
>
> Some people before you did ask such questions, and on that account lost their faith. (5:102)

The opposite of *'ilm* is *zann*, which means opinion, assumption, supposition, speculation. The Qur'an states that dependence on *zann* cannot lead to *haqq* (truth). Truth and knowledge, then, are not made up of defined specifics of what is known, but rather encompass all of what an individual's comprehension can absorb (Pasha 1993, p. 66). An individual concerned with the uses of the media must have an understanding of what knowledge is, what its sources and limitations are, and how important a role it plays in the Islamic worldview. Only by realizing this can the individual commence building his or her character as a professional whose very objectives are to disperse knowledge and to create a forum for the education of his or her people.

- *Personality traits*

Fundamental to a Muslim's character is the understanding that all humans are equal in the eyes of their Creator. The Qur'an symbolizes equity by its very use of the gender-, race- and class-neutral term *al-naas*, the people, to address mankind (Pasha 1993, p. 67). Regardless of one's race, sex, or station in life, piety alone distinguishes one person from another:

...Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most Righteous of you.... (49:13)

Because of this principle, Muslims are explicitly forbidden to be insolent or arrogant, or to seek to undermine one another. All individuals, regardless of who they are, must be afforded their due respect and honor. The Qur'an states:

Nor walk on the earth with insolence: for you cannot rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height. (17:37)

O you who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: It may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Nor let some women laugh at others:...Nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by offensive nicknames: Ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed:... (49:11)

The most hated to me...will be the most talkative, harsh in their tone, and those who are haughty in talking (RS1738).

The holy prophet neither talked indecently, nor did he listen to indecent talk (RS625).

God treats with displeasure a person who is given to loose and vulgar talk (RS626).

A perfect Muslim is neither a taunter, a curser, an abuser, nor one having a long tongue (RS1555).

It is plain that vulgar language, cursing, or even a harsh tone of voice, can detract from an individual's dignity and self-worth. No matter how privileged or accomplished an individual may be, it is only through God's will that they have acquired the position they hold. A Muslim acknowledges this and seeks to thank God by being kind and benevolent to others who are less fortunate. Especially if one is in a position of power and influence, he or she becomes, in effect, God's trustee, and will inevitably be held accountable as to whether or not their power was used to serve and benefit society:

...Say: "Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition." (39:9)

Media professionals, as gatekeepers to vital information, are especially required to be of high moral character, and being in the public eye demands that they be positive role models for the people they influence.

Often, the contemporary media professional finds him- or herself in a position where all news becomes "just news" and he or she becomes detached and indifferent. Because of this cold, "objective," "scientific" approach, devoid of emotion, "anything goes," and the manner in which the reporter presents it becomes secondary. Arrogance comes in when so-called experts or pundits of the media present their views as the only valid and objective ones. These experts afford themselves the privilege of devaluing the opinions of others who are not interpreting events on the same level (Powell 1993). In Islam, however, the media professional must be before all else a member of the *Umma*, of society, and as such, obligated towards others, and bearing certain duties and responsibilities. The issue is viewed thus:

> God hates the person who twists his tongue in eloquence while talking (RS1737).

> Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) Desire. (53:3)

The second quote refers to "experts" expressing whatever comes to mind, whatever they deem most important and relevant. In Islam, however, individuals are not supposed to throw out supposedly reasoned but actually careless opinions. They must weigh their words carefully in view of the fact that they can influence so many minds and, in many cases, the outcome of events. Often, the sound-bite approach creates a competitiveness among "pundits," who try to beat each other at using the most witty or catchy phrases. This circulation of opinions lightly, with no thought to the consequences, is addressed in the Qur'an:

> Behold, you received it on your tongues. And said out of your mouths things of which you had no knowledge; and you thought it to be a light matter, while it was most serious in the sight of God. (24:15)

Journalists often justify exposing news and events simply because they were not told not to. While those who are being interviewed see the journalist as human, as someone with whom to share ideas, the interviewer always maintains his professional stance and is essentially just "looking for a good quote" (Williams 1993). An imbalance is created when there is no exchange of human emotions or sentiments. This imbalance then leads to a skewed vision—media professionals do not see others as primarily human,

and so they are able to rationalize their endless quest to conquer some "truth." Media professionals, as individuals, often become numb to the tragedies they report. Should they display any emotion, they are seen as weak reporters and somehow tainted with bias. If media professionals were to feel empathy and become more human in their methods, they would take into consideration the consequences of actions taken or quotes repeated. Additional verses from the Qur'an and Sunna are relevant here:

> O ye who believe! Why say you that which you do not? (61:2)
>
> Even utterance of nice words is a charity (RS694).
>
> And the servants of (God) most gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace;" (25:63)
>
> Invite all to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious:... (16:125)
>
> Shyness and modesty are good all in all; shyness and humility are good in their entirety (RS682).
>
> A person addicted to carrying tales will not enter paradise (RS1536).

When media professionals come to realize that they are not above or apart from humanity, they will take extra precautions not to harm the feelings and dignity of their fellow humans. Media professionals in an Islamic society become dignified and respected as they themselves dignify and respect others. They are above partaking in stereotyping, or making sarcastic or vicious attacks on other ideas, individuals or groups (be it for the sake of intellectual discourse or for entertainment purposes), or engaging in fruitless dialogue aimed at outdoing another or soliciting a laugh. Every opinion, individual and group is afforded the required respect. If disagreement is to be expressed, it is to be done respectfully, through civil, sound arguments, logic, and the presentation of facts, and not through mere mockery or facetious sarcasm. Such approaches only serve to increase ill will within society and polarize groups. A healthy, respectful dialogue, on the other hand, enhances everyone's credibility and contributes positively to society.

• *Rising above the "lowest common denominator"*

> Those who love (to see) scandal published broadcast among the Believers, will have a grievous Penalty in this life and in the Hereafter: God knows, and you know not. (24:19)

> O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin. And spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs.... (49:12)

> People who exaggerate are ruined (RS1736).

> Woe to every (Kind of) scandalmonger and backbiter, (104:1)

> Leave those things which create doubts in your mind and adopt that which does not create any doubt in your mind (RS593).

In Islamic society, unity is maintained through conformity with the commands in the Qur'an to be as accepting and tolerant of others as possible. Along with this tolerance comes the notion that others are not to be slandered in any way; a "grievous penalty" is reserved for those who needlessly foster the spread of that which causes a breakdown in society. Cultivating doubt and scandal leads to a distraction from the very mission of a Muslim's life. The mundane and undignified act of peering into titillating subjects only trivializes the reasons for existence. As insignificant as contemporary professionals consider scandal and divisiveness to be, the Qur'an states that it is these small issues, which if practiced, lead to mistrust and eventual chaos in society.

Much of the contemporary media subscribes to the "lowest common denominator" approach, which appeals to the baser, most prevalent interests of an audience. This results in a high concentration of programs that contain elements of sex, violence, and arousing scenes of what happens behind closed doors in the lives of others. Television mini-series jump at chances to make "real-life docu-dramas" based on stories from the headlines: (e.g., "Mother Attempts Murder of Daughter's Cheerleader Competition"). Shows depicting "real life" police officers making dramatic drug busts or arrests are popular because they make the dark underworld of crime more accessible via television. Much of the music that is given an outlet through the media today contains lyrics considered by some to be lewd and demeaning. Prevalent themes have been misogyny, disrespect for the law, and the romanticizing of criminal activity. Various artists justify such themes as being representative of the reality surrounding minority life

in Western society. Tabloid talk shows and magazines, whose stated mission is to bring to the public what really goes on in society, regularly feature topics such as sex scandals, the lifestyles of the rich and famous, or previously tabooed themes to attract and maintain their growing audiences. Hosts encourage audience questions that are detailed and prying, and demand from their guests a tell-all presentation. In many cases, family members "confess" intimate family matters on-screen in front of millions of viewers, while the host encourages this by saying it is a form of "therapy" to expose secrets they might otherwise never discuss outside the family circle.

Although such material is good for ratings and circulation, it only rarely contributes to the audience's understanding and appreciation of the world around them. Conversely, in Islamic media, although there does exist a "lowest common denominator," it must be wrestled with and not in any way exploited. Another source of sensationalism and gossip is the exposure of the mistakes and shortcomings of others. The Qur'an and Sunnah have this to say about these issues:

> ...Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for God's forgiveness for them;... (3:159)

> A Muslim is the brother of another Muslim. He neither betrays him nor tells him a lie nor humiliates him or brings shame on him (RS235).

> One who covers up the failings of somebody in this world will have his shortcomings covered up by God on the day of judgment (RS240).

> Every one of my followers will be forgiven except those who make public the faults of other people (RS241).

> No companion of mine should tell me anything bad about another person. For I like, when I meet you, for my heart to be clean (unbiased) (RS1539).

In addition to concealing faults, it is important for Muslims not to allow the power of suspicion to overcome their judgement. Again, it is vital that the fabric of society be woven with threads of trust and security:

> Guard against suspicion, for suspicion is the greatest falsehood. Do not be inquisitive about other people's faults, nor spy against others (RS1570).

> It is sufficient to make a man a liar when he goes on circulating without verification all that he has heard (RS1547).

Conclusion

Truly Islamic media would attempt to be kind, humane and benevolent institutions. They would have genuine concern and love for the people they serve and seek to inspire. Without such a goal, the media become self-serving, and in many cases ill-serving, institutions. Self-serving media eventually come to justify such questionable methods as spying, yellow journalism and muckraking, all of which, in society's eyes, erode their trustworthiness. Finally, by not taking into consideration simple things such as the other's point of view, human weakness, and the right to privacy, lives, careers and aspirations are likely to suffer.

A contemporary development worthy of note is the Muslim world's conscious attempt to return to tradition for guidance. Muslims are now engaged in a struggle to break away from the pattern of merely promoting post-modernist, postcolonial movements that only address alien issues created by the "other." Our going back, in this research, to tradition for guidance in reforming the media, is part of the larger attempt of the Islamic world to reform existing social wrongs, and to rectify what is perceived as a straying from the principles that made the Islamic civilization great in the past. It is, in essence, a "setting of our own house in order" along familiar and proven ideological guidelines.

In this portion of the present study, the focus has been on religious principles and their relation to communication media. It has become apparent that directives for ethical media are integral within the Islamic framework. The next step, then, is to answer the question posed by Hamid Mowlana (1989b, p. 146) on how best to devise structural changes and institutional setups that would help realize those ideological principles. This is attempted in the following section, entitled "Working principles for an Islamic model in Mass Media communication."

Chapter 4

Working Principles for an Islamic Model in Mass Media Communication

Aesthetics and the Islamic Model

As has been discussed in earlier sections of this study, there is an inseparable relationship between the Islamic arts and the concept of *tawḥid*, the oneness of God. Any art tradition includes culturally acceptable combinations of content and form. For the Islamic arts, these components must be informed by this ideology of the oneness of God, and therefore modeled in accordance with the aesthetic characteristics of content and form found in the Qur'an itself (Faruqi 1989, p. 469).

An Islamic worldview acknowledges the impact that spiritual beliefs have on one's values, attitudes and behavior, and asserts the individual's responsibility, and intellectual capacity, to make conscious behavioral choices. According to the Qur'an, one of the basic spiritual needs of man is the need for beauty, which is equated with perfection or truth. Hamid Mowlana refers to this need in Islamic culture as being an "ideational" rather than a "sensate" one. In a culture strong in ideational elements, the needs and aims are overwhelmingly spiritual and, with reality being appreciated as non-sensate and nonmaterial, the interest is focused more on the transcendental. In its style, ideational culture is mainly symbolic, and must remain so (Mowlana 1989a, p. 7). For example, with regard to visual art a Muslim artist would use physical beauty (experienced through the sense of

sight) as a vehicle to afford the viewer an intuition into divine perfection and beauty (Muhammed 1989, p. 488).

Sensate art, conversely, aims to refine sensual enjoyment (enjoyment experienced through any of the various senses), and as a result, it must be sensational, and often devoid of religious and moralistic elements. Usually, this type of art is entertaining, amusing, novel, naturalistic, visual, and free from any supersensory symbolism. Mowlana argues that in the West—both capitalist and socialist—there is a "crisis of the dominance of sensate culture and communication in search of new forms and patterns, being confronted with ever-increasing new technologies, digital information, and entertainment systems that contradict individual human needs and desires." To confront this dichotomy, Islamic society has as its goal not only to strive for an integration of the two cultures, but also to ensure that the sensate culture will not dominate society. The ideational type, within the Islamic tradition and format, must be, and remain, prevalent over the others (Mowlana 1989a, p. 7).

In the ideational framework, the beautiful and significant in art is not solely an aesthetic portrayal of human attributes and distinctions. In keeping with this concept, the visual artist uses a "non-individuational" approach. Because an increased social, religious and cultural harmony must be achieved, there is less emphasis on the individual player or on any individual element. Rather, emphasis is on the entire group and the sense of a harmonious co-existence among all its members. In Islamic art, cooperation rather than competition guides the aesthetic portrayal of what is pleasing and beautiful.

Freedom of Expression in the Islamic Model

As I said in the previous chapter regarding the issue of tolerance, the Islamic worldview asserts that the concept of freedom of expression and ideology are consistent with an Islamic paradigm. Here the discussion focuses more intently on the issue of freedom of expression, with an attempt to place it within the context of an Islamic media model. As was pointed out earlier, ideological and intellectual freedom has nothing to fear from an Islamic state, nor from the principles, aims and system of Islam. Freedom of opinion provides room for free scope and balance, as well as stability and growth. While Islam forbids the use of coercion (verbal as well

as physical) by those seeking to spread its faith, it also takes measures to protect Muslims against expression that would deny them their own freedom.

The Status of Freedom of Expression in the Muslim World

In the Muslim world today there is a significant absence of any institutionalized notion of free expression and dialogue. This situation is considered a failure to uphold Islamic principles, and is made more glaring by the inability to develop mass media capable of articulating to the Muslim masses the truth about themselves and the world. Certain publications have attempted to fill this need by creating for themselves frameworks that were not tied to the many "corrupt" regimes and influences in the Muslim political world. But, precisely because their frameworks were alien to the political world they were reporting on, and their attempts to present the untainted "truth" were over-zealous, they met their end quickly and completely (el-Affendi 1993, p. 98).[12]

Another issue that plagues all aspects of the Muslim world is that the restoration of an adequate system of consultation (*shūrā*) among a body of elected Muslim leaders has yet to be implemented. Muslim domains, for the past century, have been ruled autocratically without clear representation by the people governed. As a result of such a prolonged period of suppression, individuals in Muslim society find it difficult to comprehend what freedom of expression means. Unquestioning submission to authority, and the censorship of one's own thoughts and opinions has, over many generations, been so ingrained in the culture that many contemporary Muslims balk at the notion of a person speaking his or her own mind (El-Affendi 1993, p. 87).

Definition of, and Restrictions on, Free Expression

The issue of *shūrā* deals directly with free dialogue and expression. This concept of consultation is central to Islamic society, and can only be made

12. An example of such publications include *Arabia* which was published in England and covered Muslim-world news. It published between 1981 and 1987. Initially, it was supported by the Arab governments. Once *Arabia* took the position of presenting all news in as objective a manner as possible, it frequently was censored and banned by the very governments which had supported it. With such restrictions to the magazine's output, it ultimately collapsed.

operative to a satisfactory standard in the context of genuine free dialogue and discussion among the largest number of concerned Muslims (el-Affendi 1993, p. 86). To this extent the Shari'a has institutionalized the individual's freedom to investigate facts and ideas so as to formulate and express an opinion (Kamali 1993, p. 178). Such freedom is also necessary if a Muslim is to fulfill his or her duty to ascertain the truth, speak out against injustice, or actively support and establish what is good (Osman 1989, p. 101).

Therefore, freedom is a right, an attitude and a responsibility like any other. It cannot be practiced in isolation or in the midst of chaos. More than anything else, freedom needs to be regulated, since it has a most serious bearing on a person's life and the meaning of his or her existence. Freedom of will in general, and of expression in particular, are the rights of the "mature and sane" individual who is able to understand the meaning and effects of freedom, and to bear responsibility for his or her actions in life and in society (AbuSulayman 1993, p. 83).[13]

Islamic guidelines define legitimate freedom of expression as coming from this pursuit of either truth or knowledge, and as not being a means for the destruction, abuse, and ultimate disintegration of community (Kamali 1993, p. 182). The intentions lying behind an individual's use of freedom of expression are crucial. If the intent is to create doubt by confusing truth with lies in such a way that neither is supported by proof, then such use of free expression would not be allowed. Significantly, however, this prohibition against creating doubt through the use of the freedom of expression does not apply only to religious matters (Kamali 1993, p. 188).

Taken to an extreme, freedom of expression can be detrimental to the thinking and reasoning process of individuals. If random and arbitrary freedom of expression is used to put personal opinion and experience over reason and mutual understanding, the community's well-being is at stake (Kamali 1993, p. 190). If free expression is used to instigate harmful sedition and incitement to mutiny, violate the freedom of religion, distort interpretation, or indulge in obscenity or corruption, then it is prohibited in Islam (Kamali 1993, p. 197).

Free expression taken to the extreme includes forums that promote obscenity, sensuality and lust. Obscenity has proven to be a difficult-to-define term and part of the difficulty lies in the changeability of public

13. "Mature" in this context implies that individuals have proven that they are capable of reasoning and realize they are held accountable.

opinion regarding what is acceptable. Notwithstanding this difficulty, Islam states that freedom of expression with regard to obscenity must be regulated in the interest both of public decency and of "protecting vulnerable members of society from provocative expressions that appeal to base and ignoble passions" (Kamali 1993, p. 190).[14] Obscenity comprises all indecent speech and conduct, mainly relating to sexual perversity, by those who are, according to society's standards, morally depraved. Such people speak of sex in explicitly repugnant and abusive language, which is either reprehensible or forbidden by Islamic rules of etiquette (Kamali 1993, p. 193).

Additional restrictions on free expression include people's right to privacy, and justifiable security requirements, especially in time of war. According to Islamic legal principles, in practicing the right of criticism a line should be drawn between criticizing an ordinary man and criticizing one in public office. In the latter case, a distinction should be made between their public activities and their personal life. The ethical values of Islam that secure privacy and forbid spying or any violation of personal rights should be observed. Groundless allegations without any justification cannot be tolerated, and slander and libel are forbidden (Osman 1989, p. 107).

Finally, 'AbdulHamid AbuSulayman asserts that "any individual action which transgresses the regulations laid down by society loses its legitimacy. However, the regulations themselves will lose their legitimacy if they are not intended to preserve the individual's rights to freedom of belief and thought" (AbuSulayman 1993, p. 91).

Individual and State Responsibilities

These regulations and restrictions are to be formed and implemented by an Islamic state. Islamic tenets assert that both the state and the individual have obligations towards one another. It is the responsibility of those in positions of authority not only to allow people to express themselves as individuals or groups, but also to facilitate the establishment of sound pub-

14. In most Western countries, obscenity is not protected as a form of free speech. The Supreme Court of the United States, on many occasions, has attempted to define what is obscene. In a 1973 case, the court stated that local standards and juries in each community should determine what is obscene. Such a test of obscenity would include these principles: "1) whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work as a whole appeals to prurient interest; 2) whether the work depicts or describes in a patently offensive way certain sexual conduct that is specifically spelled out by a state law; and 3) whether the whole work lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value" (Dominick 1987, p. 398).

lic opinion by continuously providing accurate information to the people. The leaders are also obligated to display all the facts and evidence about an issue raised by their own initiative or in response to requests (Osman 1989, p. 105).

Another responsibility the state has towards its citizens is to uphold their right to choose which ideology to follow. The state must recognize this right, respect people's decision, and guarantee that this right is upheld for all persons including those outside Islamic countries (AbuSulayman 1993, p. 83). Religious as well as political heads of state may not fight against their opposition over mere differences of opinion unless the opposition breaks the peace and engages in violence (Kamali 1993, p. 184). The opposition has the right to propagate its views through peaceful means, and enjoys the freedom within the limits of the Shari'a to say what it wishes. The community also has the right to refute such views. If either side verbally or otherwise violates the Shari'a injunctions pertaining, for example, to blasphemy and slander, the perpetrator can be punished in accordance with the law (Kamali 1993, p. 187).

Attempts aiming at political sedition without providing a clear and expressed alternative are an abuse of the freedom of expression that threatens the security of a lawful government. Words and acts constitute *fitna*, dissension or sedition, only if they succeed, or are likely to succeed, in posing a threat to a society's normal order. An isolated opinion that remains ineffective and does not incite opposition to a lawful government would therefore not qualify as *fitna* (Kamali 1993, p. 180).

An Islamic society is one in which there is freedom for creativity in opposing the government's position. But in the final analysis, criticism and opposition must be employed as a catalyst for reform and enlightenment rather than for dissension and rebellion. Muslim citizens cannot be passive subjects, and Muslim rulers cannot enjoy absolute powers.

Media Professionals and the Media Audience

If the media are to represent an Islamic worldview, the primary creator and producer of the material must possess three main characteristics. The media professional must have a clear conception of: first, to whom he or

she is accountable; second, what type of knowledge is required; and third, whom he or she is representing.

Such a grounding in an Islamic worldview would begin with media professionals appreciating that they are accountable for everything they say and do. This accountability, as outlined earlier in the discussion on methodology, would not be merely towards their audiences, but, above all, to God. To re-emphasize the point that current media models do not follow this Islamic concept of accountability, it is interesting to note that some media scholars hold that media professionals are apparently subject to no authority at all, formal or informal. Each is his or her own master, and answers only to his or her conscience—which circumstance may or may not meet the needs of the public. In fact, the needs of the public are shaped by the media as the institutions absolve themselves of all accountability. The same argument goes on to say that media people value "professionalism" more than accountability; what is most important for them is the approval of their peers (el-Affendi 1991, pp. 72-73).

In an Islamic context, accountability would also involve having sufficient knowledge of Islam itself. A media person should be able to quote the Qur'an properly, and use Qur'anic and Islamic law in arguments and positions taken. In addition to this basic knowledge, they need a reasonable grounding in Islamic history, which would aid in the development of a well-rounded perspective on Muslim life. In order for writers, editors or directors to express Islamic concepts in their work, they must first understand them themselves. In their daily lives, media professionals need to follow an Islamic way of life as perfectly as possible so that they can work with intuitive understanding.

This intuitive sense would include the capacity to identify which institutions and practices should be respected, and how to best approach these through the media model. Through an awareness of local traditions, the media person would know what images, techniques and approaches are harmonious with local customs. Media professionals cannot succeed if they consider themselves "elite," or live as recluses. Rather, by being in touch with society, a media professional comes to learn which issues are relevant and important, and which are potentially divisive (Muhammed 1989, p. 489). Currently, media professionals are far from representative of the wider society. Studies have found that members of the profession are less religious, more liberal, and generally unrepresentative of a moderate society. For example, in the United States, 50 percent of media people, accord-

ing to one study, deny any religious affiliation, while 70 percent of the public claim membership in a religious group (Schleifer 1986, p. 118).

As for the media audience, it would be useful to refer back to the concept, introduced in our discussion of methodology above, of addressing the masses in their own tongue. Media, in the Islamic model, cannot be exclusive, and should aim to channel their benefits to the maximum number of individuals. The audience, for Islamic media, is not merely part of a demographics game in which the whole population is crudely segmented according to spending potential. Programs should not be designed and presented with the hidden purpose of attracting a particular type of viewer who can be induced to buy certain products. This approach is ultimately at the expense of poor and minority viewers, who do not have a spending power that warrants programs appealing to their tastes and needs. Rather, in Islamic media, presentations should be intelligible to, and able to be appreciated by, most members of society. Media productions geared for the affluent minority, which encourage that minority to take pride in their exclusivity, are unquestionably un-Islamic. The media should rather address the concerns and plight of people with a lower standard of living, in order to reinforce the Islamic ideal of equality (Muhammed 1989, p. 488).

Maintaining equality does not necessarily preclude media presentations being segmented. Shows geared towards segments of society such as women, or children, or programs focusing on special education and basic vocational skills, in the long run ultimately benefit the whole of society. Also, programs reaching out to minorities are crucial if the Islamic media model is to present a holistic sense of equality. Also to be encouraged are various foreign-language, cultural, and religious presentations that would allow minorities to find their place in the majority society while maintaining their own identity—an identity Islam encourages them to keep.

Functional Elements of the Islamic Media Model

General Form

As established in chapter three of this study, Islam provides society with a clear purpose, and offers methods and guidelines by which it may attain

its purpose. The content of Islamic media—be it entertainment, education, or news—and the methodology used, must coincide with this fundamental purpose—that of remembering God.

• *Content*

As a general rule, Islamic media cannot be "idle;" nor can they be an end in and of themselves. Programming or communication designed merely to entertain, or to present obscure, irrelevant incidents as news items, can become a waste of valuable time and resources. The content should consistently emphasize good values and practices, along with communal identity, pride, mutual aid, and cooperation in building society (Abusulayman 1981, p. 12). Themes relevant to such quality content might include the following:[15]

1. Discussing or demonstrating attributes of God such as benevolence and mercy;
2. Contemplation of the signs of God in the natural world;
3. Understanding and appreciating other cultures and ways of life;
4. A general promotion of good values, and condemnation of negative values that are destructive forces within society;
5. Praising and encouraging citizens actively involved in shaping the norms and functions of society according to the Islamic worldview;
6. Presentation of the basic tenets of Islam, for non-Muslims or Muslims not educated in the faith. This would include various levels of analysis of the Qur'an and Sunnah as they pertain to daily life;
7. General educational programming to improve the socioeconomic status of viewers and to teach skills needed to enhance productivity;
8. The history and heritage of Islamic culture, as well as discussion of what historical interfacing is on-going in the modern world.

• *Methodology*

Also, as established in chapter three, the methodology and approach followed in Islamic media must likewise adhere to certain principles. The following are a few of the essential guidelines within which Islamic media must operate:

1. The "language" used must be that of the culture being addressed. The term "language" as used here comprises the symbols, traditions, gestures and references used, as well as spoken and written communication.
2. A tolerant and unbiased approach must be used in all circumstances. Such an approach applies not only to the presentation of facts but also to the portrayal of the sexes, and of various races, creeds, classes and lifestyles.

15. These points are a summary of what has already been elaborated on in the previous chapter.

3. Total thoroughness must be observed in researching and presenting only the truth. Ultimately, the media must be fully accountable for everything they say and do.
4. Proper Islamic ethics and etiquette must be maintained in the content, form and all other aspects of Islamic media. This includes dress, language, behavior, interaction between the sexes, and interactions in society at large.

A genuine concern that comes to mind in discussing a religion-based model is that regarding extremism. One extreme that has already been discussed is that of the media becoming an end in itself. The other extreme is that of the media becoming excessively or aggressively religious in character. Such an approach would stifle creativity, and marginalize the media and render them ineffective. Although overtly religious programming aiming to remind and educate people is important, it should be kept to a minimum and not be allowed to permeate the media. Spirituality and spiritual content may be woven into the programs themselves, but in a balanced manner, so as to truly reflect the level of spirituality that is observed in everyday society. For example, in a dramatic presentation, characters would exhibit a level of religiosity not exceeding that characteristic of an ordinary member of society.

Certain controversial issues in Muslim society such as abortion, usury, veiling and moon-sighting[16] can easily lend themselves to a purely religious analysis and interpretation. If such issues were discussed in the media within such a context, it would lead to the media's radicalization. Here too, a moderate approach must be observed so as to maintain the media's credibility and avoid creating a polarized society. Such matters should be addressed as public affairs issues in forums suitable for open debate and discussion. Even topics such as sex, birth control and pornography— which constitute real issues in people's lives—need to be addressed, but in a manner consistent with Islamic etiquette, and without resorting to explicit scenes and examples (Moustafa 1990, p. 314).

16. In the Muslim calendar, which is lunar, the beginning of each new month is determined by the birth of the crescent. Traditionally, once an eyewitness claims that he or she has seen the new moon, the beginning of another month is declared. This practice is especially significant when determining the first day of the month of Ramadhan upon which all Muslims must observe an obligatory fast. In contemporary times, many argue that since the exact moon cycle can be calculated mathematically, we know in advance precisely when each month will begin and end. Others however, insist that eyewitnesses still be used in determining a new month.

• Imports

In many situations it might not be economically feasible for a Muslim community to produce all its own programming and material. Certainly, the prospect of importing a portion of what is needed, at much lower cost, is always appealing to struggling media efforts. Danger lies, however, in the indiscriminate use of such programming, and in an over-reliance on such "quick-fixes," which establish a dependency situation difficult to break away from. Such dependency also inhibits any serious efforts to meet local needs through the training and development of one's own talent and productions. Under such circumstances, moderation is again called for. Muslim communities should import only what is absolutely necessary, keeping in mind the ultimate goal of becoming completely self-sufficient.

Any material that is imported, however, must still comply with the guidelines established earlier regarding content and methodology. While this may rule out a considerable amount of material that is currently available on the world market, there still remains a large portion that can be used with little or no modification. Such programs include many science and nature shows (*National Geographic, Nova, The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*), children's educational and entertainment shows (*Sesame Street, The Wonderful World of Disney*), Adult dramas (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*), and some news oriented programs (*Monitor Radio*). In general, these shows stress positive values and are by-and-large compatible with the Islamic worldview. Hamid Mowlana has observed that in Iran, Japanese features and films dubbed into Farsi are among the most prominently placed foreign products on TV. This is due to the fact that Japanese mannerisms, deportment, clothing styles, and film content, as well as codes of conduct, are culturally compatible with those of Islam; nor are they violent or offensive to local tradition (Mowlana 1989c, p. 24).

And in Saudi Arabia, certain imported programs, such as *The Rockford Files* and *Columbo* are considered to be easily edited for Saudi television. Also, because the Kingdom is such an important market for Arab television programs, many Egyptian and Lebanese programs are conceived and produced with the requirements of the Saudi system in mind (Boyd 1993, p. 159). Because of the huge market potential of the Muslim world, international media companies might consider making productions according to Islamic guidelines, in cooperation with Muslim countries. Yet another option would be to produce media that could be easily edited and adapted to suit Islamic sensibilities.[17]

17. An important note to be made regarding imported material concerns the issue of

Entertainment Materials

Entertainment materials are integral to the Islamic media model because they are a way in which values and information can be conveyed in a leisurely and light-hearted manner. Just as with any other type of media presentation, entertainment must have purpose and direction. Sitcoms, action shows, dramas, and other forms of entertainment must all contribute to the education and consciousness-building of society. Violence must not be depicted simply for the sake of portraying brute force and sensational blood and gore. The consequences of actions, whether exaggerated or "real life," must be made clear, and linked to the actions of the various characters. Even cartoons could teach about history, other cultures, the beauty of creation, and moral issues while continuing to be entertaining.

Other issues in entertainment discussed in this section deal with what types of portrayal would be in congruence with Islamic ideals.

• *Portrayal of persons from "real life"*

It could well be argued that, in the Western media, human beings are represented as weak, fallible, devious and malicious by nature, and as being the slaves of their desires. In Islamic thought, which should be reflected in Islamic media, the human being is a dignified creature—beautiful, honorable, and rational. From an Islamic perspective, it is an abberation when humans do wrong or go astray. Their original, true nature is good.

This original goodness means that human beings, through perseverance and will, are capable of overcoming their desires and conquering the forces that could bring about their undoing (Moustafa 1990, p. 309). From the Islamic point of view, a person weak in consciousness or action is weak only temporarily. The greater part of Western programming and writing features a hero, and it is the heroic actions of this character that save the day. The Muslim vision can have no such single outstanding hero. Any individual functioning within the societal structure to promote good is regarded as a valuable asset to the society. This is true regardless of his or her race, gender, or size; there is no single stereotype of a young, handsome, and strong male who saves the day. A woman keeping her house in

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close-captioning versus dubbing a program into a local language. While close-captioning might be cheaper in cost it has a much more intrusive effect on local culture. In addition to alienating many who are illiterate, it subjugates all to a barrage of unintelligible dialogue that can only be distracting and offensive. Dubbing allows for much greater flexibility in removing any vulgar or objectionable material, substitution of alien references and cliches with more culturally compatible ones, and exhibits deference and regard for local culture and language (Moustafa 1990, p. 319).

order is considered essential to the upkeep of society. Farmers plowing against all odds to feed their families are also persons of great value and held in admiration. A hero, ultimately, is a person who is able to effect good (Moustafa 1990, p. 310). Because these individuals function within society to maintain its basic structure and attempt reform when it is called for, all of society deserves credit and recognition.

Emphasis on the hero, and obsession with individuals and groups, has also spilled over into the arena of sports. For sporting events, Western media heavily promote individual players, stress team identification, and emphasize the specific geographic and nationalistic affiliation of the teams involved (Siddiqui 1992, p. 143). Rivalries between different teams are reinforced and promoted through the media, creating a sense of regionalism and tribalism which leads to the "fanatic fan" syndrome. Tribalism of this sort, which has occasionally led to violence, cannot be propagated by Islamic media. Rather, the sport itself would be emphasized—the grace and perfection of certain skills, the health benefits gained. The feeling conveyed by a sports match would be that of admiration for both teams, a respect for exemplary performance and talent, and a desire to develop ones own athletic prowess for higher purposes in life, rather than an obsession with individuals, scores and regional aggrandizement.

Finally, real life should be represented in such a way as to maintain people's dignity and honor, taking into account their economic conditions so that they do not feel resentment on comparing what they see on-screen with their own miserable living conditions (Moustafa 1990, p. 316). The poor can be made to appear proud, and the rich, humble. All portrayals should serve to emphasize and glorify the spiritual and the good, and not the material, luxurious and worldly. Also, it should be made possible for people to hope to better themselves, and not to feel that their situation is totally hopeless.

• *Limitations*

Entertainment programming, while having the freedom to express Islamic values creatively, should also be subject to certain limitations. Humor, sarcasm, parody and cartoons are all acceptable as forms of entertainment, as long as the motivation and content are acceptable. An ever-present sense of bearing a message, or attempting social reform through entertainment, keeps media presentations from becoming merely a mind-numbing distraction.

Entertainment programming, however, must respect sacred institutions such as marriage, reverence for elders, public trust, education, and care for

the needy. People in general, and the media in particular, must view these institutions as the backbone of society, which cannot be compromised or threatened in any way. Also revered are the basic rituals and practices of Islam—prayer, pilgrimage, *zakat* (charity) and Ramaḍan. These practices are inseparable from the total Islamic way of life. Also, Islamic media cannot depict the Prophet, companions, angels, etc. in a manner that is disrespectful or unfavorable in any way (Moustafa 1990, p. 313). Furthermore, many Islamic scholars maintain that the physical depiction of God's prophets, angels or righteous caliphs either in historical dramas, educational re-creations, or children's shows and cartoons is prohibited. The rationale behind this prohibition is to prevent the possibility of an inaccurate depiction of these key elements of the faith. Without this physical representation, the prophets and other revered figures maintain a universal appeal for Muslims, who are in fact not from any one geographic or cultural background.[18] The message is more important than the messenger.

Soap-opera-style dramas (in which each episode relies heavily on the ones preceeding for the plot's coherence), with daily or weekly episodes spread over months at a time, summer hiatuses, cliff-hangers and spinoffs, are generally incompatible with Islamic principles because they deliberately seek to addict viewers instead of merely providing entertainment. This kind of programming makes viewers involved with the show to the extent that it is no longer a form of light entertainment, but a part of what defines their day's activities (everything must be planned so as not to miss a certain program). Ultimately, the very function of what Islam defines as the balanced breakdown of the day becomes obscured as viewers become captive to the schedules of such programs.

Another criticism of contemporary media practice is that it encourages and capitalizes on material that is oriented towards gossip and promotes the idolization of media celebrities. Personality journalism, tabloids, gossip-oriented publications, and the entire industry of marketing television and movie stars, building their images, displaying glamourous and candid pho-

18. One film that is popular in the Muslim world is *The Message—The Story of Islam*, produced and directed by Moustapha Akkad. Since the story chronicles the birth and rise of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad plays a large role in it. However, instead of directly portraying the Prophet himself (something that would be deeply offensive to Muslim sensibilities), Akkad incorporates the Prophet into the story by having other characters constantly referring to him and his actions in the third person. Also, when it is necessary for other characters to address the Prophet directly, Akkad has them speaking and looking directly into the camera. Thus making the camera, in a sense, the Prophet's eye.

tos of them, and promoting rumors of their current love affairs and upcoming roles, can have no validity and no place in any Islamic media model. Again, the focus and emphasis is on the message that entertainment material brings, not on the "messenger," in this case the actor who merely recites the lines, or the writer producing the dialogue for pop novels.

• Educational materials

Educational programming plays an important and vital role in the Islamic media model. In accordance with their purpose as stated above, media materials must further basic knowledge and supplement it with debate and discourse aimed at uplifting society. With this in mind, educational materials must first cover the basics of the faith. This would include a "how to" series on prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other essential practices. Further, discussions and presentations to aid in understanding key conceptual elements of the faith—the meaning of Qur'anic verses, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad—would form an important part of the educational material. As for holiday observances and special events, such as the yearly Hajj or 'Id holidays, the programming would reflect their spirit, and their historical and cultural significance.

Along with this presentation of basic knowledge, there might also be a type of program specifically addressing that portion of the population which has recently accepted Islam as their faith. Specific periodicals, publications, and videos would be designed especially to meet the needs of those who are new to the faith, without necessarily addressing them in too elementary a fashion.

A type of educational media material that needs to be elementary is that addressing children and their need for knowledge, both of the faith and of local culture. *Iftah Ya Simsim*, an Arabic adaptation of the program *Sesame Street*, is such an attempt that has proven successful as a transplant in Arab countries (Boyd 1993, p. 198). The program models used by Children's Television Workshop (CTW), the producers of *Sesame Street*, allow for the integration of local language and customs into an existing form of presentation representing an advanced and acknowledged educational methodology. Because of the transformative elements inherent in the CTW format, it might prove useful for the Islamic media model, which represents such a diversity of Muslim cultures.

Other existing programs, from such organizations as PBS and BBC, are likewise acceptable for importation and emulation by non-Western media models. Many of these programs reflect the Islamic guidelines for intro-

ducing other cultures and lifestyles, as well as for recognizing natural phenomena as reflections of God's majesty.

Public service announcements, another form of educational programming, could be used to fight illiteracy, increase productivity, or curb inflation. Short pieces can be aimed at helping parents cope better with their young and teen-age children. Knowledge here is presented not just to broaden horizons, but to create a more capable and more competent community (Moustafa 1990, p. 318).

News and News Analysis

• *Introduction and methodology*

Much of our discussion regarding news and the Islamic media model has already been presented in Chapter three. The following are a few remaining issues that need to be brought up briefly and highlighted.

Schleifer (1986, p. 121) has argued that since the existing news agencies and models are essentially Western institutions, present day Muslim news services cannot create an alternative model merely by adding the word "Islamic" to "news agency" or in their reporting. To incorporate news into an Islamic media model it is necessary to Islamicize the practices and methodology of journalism.

The Islamic news model is defined by an absence of a "secular" outlook where reporting is concerned. In the Western model, the coverage of Islam, Muslim people, and the societies they form is done from a secular perspective. This separation between the religious and secular causes much to be lost in the analysis and interpretations, which incorrectly represent the people and the causes under investigation. Many articles and reports deal with themes that potentially lend themselves to consideration from an Islamic perspective, but such a perspective is rarely taken.[19] Islamic news agencies would respond by maintaining that all news is somehow related to the

19. A striking example of this is that many Arab or Islamic peace plans or initiatives have called for the restoration of Arab or "East" Jerusalem (considered part of the nation of Israel) to Arab sovereignty. To some Western ears that sounds very strange and peculiar. Many newsmen do not comprehend the significance of Jerusalem with its core being the setting for the city's intense Muslim identity—the Aqsa Mosque, with its 50 acres of numerous Muslim holy sites associated with the lives of prophets and saints. All is invariably identified in Western news-agency copy as the "Temple Mount." This identification is a pro forma one that instead of facilitating better understanding, contributes to the frustration (Schleifer 1986, pp. 116–117).

Islamic worldview. Reporting would then include issues such as the availability of alcohol on Egyptair, women increasingly wearing the *hijab* (head-cover) in the work-place, and the general spiritual events of traditional Islam. Also newsworthy would be the negative goings on in Muslim society, where in some places for example, the younger generations are seen to be neither praying nor fasting (Schleifer 1986, p. 121).

Another issue involved in establishing an Islamic news model is the basic question of what constitutes "news." In present day media models, it appears that peace, stability and continuity are not news; rather, conflict, contention and disorder are. Respectability and moral conformity are not news, but erupting scandal is. In Islam, everything affecting society, be it conflict or peace, is important. There should not, however, be an overemphasis on negative societal trends.

Present day attempts at news media by Muslim professionals have been criticized for falling into the trap of a "reverse secularism," reflecting the Western media's reduction of Islamic phenomena to narrowed-down Islamic political phenomena. Secularism typically insists that religion has nothing to do with the public, or rather, political domain. When religion is perceived to overstep its traditional role and intrude into the political scene, only then is it considered newsworthy. Hostile and secular reporters are unable to recognize a religious news story unless it glaringly falls into this pattern. The reverse-secularism of some Islamic journalism likewise insists that religion is worthy of reporting only in the political domain, and the domain of political confrontation to boot (Schleifer 1986,119–120).

The issue here is that Islamic journalism to date has been ignoring the newsworthiness of the life and activities of the contemporary Muslim world in favor of the (lesser) newsworthiness of the various Islamic political movements. This results in a focus on the political polarizations and radicalization of much of the Muslim world, which have little to do with the everyday reality of mainstream Muslim society (Schleifer 1986, p. 120). When Muslim journalists reinforce this substitution, not only is Islam overpoliticized, but the journalists invariably become sidetracked into the same sort of superficial reporting of organized political life in the Muslim world that characterizes the secular press. Ultimately, the result is a severe underreporting on many social or public developments of profound importance to Muslims.

This situation is of vital importance because the Islamic news model is directed to reflect the "big picture." Judgements must not be made based on minor details or events analyzed in isolation without taking the whole pic-

ture into account. Stories must always be told in relation to the overall functions and purpose of society. Keeping the big picture in mind at all times develops a mature, informed audience with focused priorities that is capable of responding in an effective way (Shanqiti 1986, p. 110).

Before venturing further into the subject of the news model, it is helpful to reflect briefly on the discussion in the previous chapter. The following points were made with regard to news methodology:

1. The media must realize that they are not above or apart from humanity, and that they must take precautions not to bring harm to the feelings and dignity of their fellow humans.
2. The media cannot be passive. Rather, they have a moral and activist role to play in the uplifting of society. They are, in effect, advocate media.
3. Tolerant media provide all news and all sides to a story "as is," without exhaustive interpretation. When they do provide an interpretation, they do so only after all sides have been fairly considered. The chosen interpretation should coincide with the media's purpose, stated earlier.
4. The media professional must be before all else a member of the *Umma*, of society, obligated towards others, and with certain duties and responsibilities.

• *News content*

Again drawing from the previous chapter, it is helpful to reconsider the points made about the content of news:

1. When relaying good news—in times of economic prosperity, peaceful reconciliation, a decline in crime—Islamic media would attribute such good fortune to God and His mercy.
2. News stories should acknowledge that any hardship encountered is not merely a random and arbitrary act of nature, but rather something that God has ordained.
3. The media must accentuate positive over negative news. This will have an inspiring and motivational effect on others.
4. The media are responsible for making all Muslims aware of situations affecting them so that they can fulfill their duties and come to one another's aid.

To add to the above points, the Islamic model prefers the "soft news with commentary" approach to "hard" news. This "soft" news feature approach is more compatible with the Islamic worldview than the "hard news" one because it stresses analysis, thoughtfulness, and a framing of stories in their social, historical, and political context (Schleifer 1986, p. 124). Ultimately, this approach brings to audiences the human side of the story. Meanwhile, the hard news approach—with its cutthroat, immediate, breaking story and

pouring out of a barrage of facts—does not support the principles outlined above.

In the wake of the explosion in media technology, there is now an over-emphasis on the speed of reporting. The more emphasis there is on speed, the more "news" is identified exclusively with current events at the expense of presentations explaining the historical process necessary for critical understanding. Neville Petersen's argument and criticism of contemporary news models is in line with what an Islamic criticism would be. He states that while the technology is recognized for its intrinsic value in providing eye-witness accounts of a far greater range of events, resulting at times in considerable emotional impact (e.g., starving Somalis), it has taken a considerable toll on traditional news-gathering standards. In this satellite age, as everyone attempts to be first with a news flash, the main concentration is on spot news rather than on any analysis of issues. Knowledgeable analysts are ignored in favor of clever anchors who can be anywhere at any time. Such a concentration on speed occasionally leads to errors; a rumor can become a "fact," and start off a chain reaction. In the Gulf War, continuous coverage necessitated the broadcast of every rumor, press conference and piece of local gossip (Petersen 1992, p. 185).

Additionally, Islamic media, as part of their obligation to remind people of their duties towards society and one another, would use news to inform viewers of who the needy are and what organizations exist through which help can be provided. In this manner, community members can fulfill their duty of giving *zakat* (obligatory alms) in an informed way.

• Limitations

The notions that the public has a "right to know" and that "nothing is sacred" are inherently anti-Islamic and must be re-examined. Since, in Islam, the media are not primarily accountable to the public, there are limitations. The "right to know" brings with it a strong potential for the invasion of privacy. The "lowest common denominator" factor, discussed in the previous chapter, also comes into play if restrictions are not applied. Also, media should not merely emphasize people's personal lives, but should instead concentrate on broader issues of more general concern to society (Moustafa 1990, p. 321).

Limitations also extend to the issues of verification, and objectivity in news analyses. As mentioned earlier, verification of news should be done either through documentation and testimony, witnesses, and internal validity or context, and through a determination of the sources' objectivity and

lack of bias. Factual reporting that is accurate but out of context is forbidden. Not only is a Muslim required to verify the news item itself, but should know the circumstances that occasioned the incident as well (Seini 1986, p. 282). Media have to be meticulous in their research of facts and information, and no error or room for damaging speculation should be allowed. If there is no conclusive proof, nothing should be mentioned or speculated about.

Generally, objectivity is construed to mean: reporting only observable phenomena, reporting without personal emotions, opinions or values, and presenting all sides equally. A broader Islamic concept of objectivity would require not a supposed elimination of values in judging whether or not to circulate a news item, but the introduction of values based on the ultimate objectivity of God as revealed throughout the Qur'an (Seini 1986, p. 288).

Production Elements

Along with the content of media, certain production techniques and conventions also need to be re-evaluated to be more in tune with the Islamic culture and worldview. A brief discussion of some of the more prominent and more easily discerned elements follows.

• *Balance*

The Western tradition uses shots based on a developmental structure in which constituent parts are evolved, one after the other, in a seemingly unbreakable chain which leads to a focal point (Faruqi 1985, p. 23). In the Islamic tradition, however, since the whole is emphasized over its constituent parts, no one focal point dominates all the other elements in the frame. Whatever the subject matter, no single pattern or figure commands the viewer's undivided attention. Instead, all figures, whether in the foreground or background, seem equal in importance, even equal in size (Faruqi 1985, p. 112). No single item or element would figure prominently in the center of the frame, and all the elements would be arranged carefully around a neutral center to convey balance. Tension is minimized in this manner, thus imparting a feeling of harmony and peace, which reflects divine grace and benevolence.

• *Shape and form*

In line with its traditional avoidance of naturalism, the primary shapes used in Islamic visual art are geometric and abstract. Circular, round and naturally occurring shapes are de-emphasized in favor of octagonal, hexag-

onal, square, triangular, etc. motifs. It is in the perfection of complex geometric designs and patterns that the artist symbolizes the intricate complexity and depth of divine will in maintaining the universe. In Islamic media, such a consideration would apply to the design of sets and to the choice of props used.

Form, in Islam, is also primarily non-developmental. No one section of a work is more conclusive than another, and even the end of a work produces no impression of finality. Instead, it would reveal an attempt to express aesthetically the infinity emphasized in the Islamic view of the transcendent realm. The organization of the various parts attempts to impart to the viewer a feeling of what is beyond sense, beyond knowledge (Faruqi 1985, p. 24). Elements in the picture often break through the borders, giving an impression of a transcendence never completely explicable or expressible (Faruqi 1985, p. 25). Thus, "open form," or the use of the frame to suggest a temporary masking—a window that arbitrarily cuts off part of the world—is primarily used (Giannetti 1990, p. 446).

Media artists working from an Islamic perspective would find compatibility with a great variety of motifs from the world around them. They need only to de-naturalize these motifs to make them fit their own purpose. The uniqueness of Muslim artists is revealed not so much in what motifs they choose, but in the way they alter them, and combine them in their message.

• Space

One common technique used in Western productions is the use of ceilings, walls and other props to convey a sense of confinement. Every action is tied to a physical, material setting. Islamic sensibility is, however, one of space transcended (Moore 1977, p. 221). According to Ernst Kuhnel, a feeling of limitlessness would be conveyed through an absence of "positive volume." There are no ornamental objects or images that have no practical purpose (Kuhnel 1966, p. 26). Settings are sparse and minimal; walls are bare, and incorporate huge open portals through which viewers are directly linked to the vast openness beyond. A mood is created in which the spiritual is emphasized over the material. One feels a freedom and ability to communicate with an omniscient Creator without barriers or elements that convey a feeling of entrapment and lack of control over one's destiny. Elements are placed in the top half of a picture to convey a more spiritual, less constrained atmosphere.

While the primary orientation is usually vertical in non-Islamic media, it is horizontal or "earth-bound" in Islam. The vertical aspect is de-empha-

sized because it is felt to convey a feeling of reaching up to the heavens and challenging the divine (Kuhnel 1966, p. 25).

• *Shots*

Since Islam is clearly pluralistic and not individualistic in its orientation, the notion of one single hero or star is alien. It is through the effort of the entire group that success is achieved. Therefore, characters and objects would be framed in long shot and medium shot. This gives the feeling of an intricate whole, with every element clearly playing its own role. Close-ups are de-emphasized as this highlights and brings individuals and their unique traits and personalities into focus. Loose framing would be emphasized over tight framing so as to better convey the feeling of freedom discussed earlier.

There is minimum manipulation of the viewer by the director, either through the selection of shots, editing, framing or motion. The director is there to provide a window into the action, and it is up to the viewer to interpret events as they happen.

• *Light*

In the Qur'an, God is described using the metaphor of light: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the lamp enclosed in Glass; the glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose Oil is well-nigh Luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! God does guide whom He will to His light:..." (24:35). Here the glass itself does not shine. But when the light comes into it, it shines like a brilliant star. So men of God are themselves illumined by God's light and become the illuminating media through which that light spreads and permeates human life (Ali 1992, p. 876).

In Islamic visual art, light is frequently used to symbolize what is true, good or divinely inspired. In images or situations depicting positive action or moral behavior, the scene is bathed in light. There is an absence of dark areas or heavy shadows, which would connote ignorance, evil or immoral actions (Ali 1992, p. 1430). Light would not draw attention to an individual character or image but would light all aspects of the scene in an even manner.

• *Movement and dynamics*

Movement in the Islamic media model is slow, deliberate and rhythmic. There is a minimum of obtrusive, sharp or jarring movement, which would

call attention to one particular aspect of the image. Movement, from an Islamic perspective, should have purpose and direction. Everything moves according to a predetermined divine plan towards its eventual destiny. Haphazard or aimless motion would convey a feeling of existentialism and lack of universal unity. Vectors and motion are, in Western media, primarily left to right; however, in Islamic culture right to left is the natural and most harmonious direction of flow. This is based on the fact that the Arabic language (the language of the Qur'an) is read from right to left (Ali 1983, p. 14).

An interesting point Abdelwahab el-Affandi brings up is that of contemporary media, particularly video and television, being inherently anti-contemplative. Traditionally, these media have not attempted to record intense spiritual experiences, which by their very nature are serene and do not involve a lot of movement (el-Affandi 1993, p. 78). Images of an individual praying or reading from the Qur'an, for example, do not adequately convey their aura of spirituality through these devices. One resolution to this problem is to place these spiritual activities in the context of God's grandeur and perfection as reflected in nature.[20]

Scheduling

The five prayer times (*fajr* at dawn, *ẓuhr* soon after noon, *'aṣr* in the late afternoon, *maghrib* at sunset, and *'ishā'* later in the evening) constitute a natural breakdown of the day for the Islamic community. Because time is taken out from the daily routine to fulfill this basic obligation of prayer, the most productive and acceptable scheduling must be constructed around these prayer times (Abusulayman 1981, p. 4). An example of this would be scheduling light educational programming during the time between *ẓuhr* and *'aṣr*, since this is traditionally a time to rest in Muslim societies. From *'aṣr* to *maghrib*, there could be programming for children as they return from school. After *maghrib*, perhaps, family-oriented programming would reinforce the Islamic value of family. The time after *'ishā'* could then be geared for adult programming. During the day—for those remaining at home—would be a time for constructive, "basic skills" programming and light entertainment. Very late night programming is not encouraged—so that people will not miss their *fajr* prayer the next morning, and be ready

20. A successful example of this approach is a video recently produced (1993) titled *The 99 Names of Allah*. As the speaker recites the highly spiritual text, viewers are shown majestic and awe-inspiring scenes of mountains, forests, deserts and lakes.

for work. Although this sample schedule delineates each portion of the day for certain audiences, it must be stressed that television should not be allowed to be an alternative to real social interaction.

Scheduled programming might also include live broadcast of local Friday (*Jum'a*) prayers. In Islamic society, the *Jum'a* prayer is the single most important unifying communal activity, and it presupposes that all trade, schooling and entertainment be halted as the community focuses on the short and inspirational sermon being delivered. Because of the very high status of the Qur'an and spirituality in Islam, depictions of either should not be scheduled as mere fillers, or sandwiched between programs that would not attract the focused attention of viewers. As discussed in chapter two, a haphazard scheduling of spiritual presentations can have undesired effects on viewers. For example, the sandwiching of a "Prayer Call" between cartoons and sitcoms suggests not only a lack of continuity and focus in the programming, but perhaps also in the daily lives of viewers.

In Islam, there is a time for seriousness and a time for fun. Fun can not be continuous, day and night. The community is encouraged to be balanced in its use of time. Entertainment is to be done in one's spare time without affecting one's productivity or preventing one from carrying out a religious obligations such as prayers. Films and other major programs should not be scheduled so that they overlap prayer times.

Talent

Actors should be rewarded and appreciated for their good work without necessarily degenerating into the merciless and destructive star cults of the West. The star system not only destroys an actor's privacy and lifestyle, but also exerts intense pressure on him or her to compete aggressively to remain in the game. Lesser-known actors are virtually marginalized in such a system, and have little or no chance of "making it."

In keeping with an Islamic worldview, the media should be of the people, and their players should be from the grassroots and in touch with society. Actors should reflect the true makeup of society and not be all of one race, young and beautiful. This would involve the use of ordinary minor actors throughout and would avoid senselessly creating mega-stars who are arrogant and out of touch. The key actors in a production should not be an end in and of themselves and should not be promoted as such; rather, the message is the end. Even in the advertising and promotion of movies, the stars should not to be stressed over the theme. Also, the ridiculously high

salaries that stars demand should be avoided, for this makes media needlessly expensive to produce and see, wastes valuable resources that could be used to improve production and content, and departs from the main purpose, which is to serve and benefit society.

With regard to the presentation of actors, the Sunnah warns against intimate proximity (*khalwa*) between strangers of the opposite sex (Kamali 1993, p. 192). It is permissible for both sexes to be on stage as long as they observe proper Islamic etiquette, attire, and respect for one another. Modesty is the key. No unrelated men and women are to be depicted as being alone together.[21]

Structural Elements of the Islamic Model

As discussed earlier, the Islamic worldview regarding the media is compatible neither with the Capitalist consumerism-oriented model nor with the Socialist authoritarian model. Rather, in the Islamic model, it is the public good and welfare that supersede any other concern. To achieve such a goal, it is necessary that neither government nor big business be allowed to have too much influence on the media. Such influence would ultimately be at society's expense. The media structure in the Islamic model must, therefore, incorporate certain mechanisms that preserve a delicate balance among competing interests, and be economically viable at the same time. The following brief discussion raises a few important questions regarding this complex issue and suggests some possible alternatives for further research and consideration.

Regulating the Media

In most Muslim countries, people have lost confidence in their media because of the excessive adulation and praise they heap on government leaders and the policies they pursue. This is often done without any con-

21. Some attempts have been made by Saudi Arabia to establish Islamic guidelines for the interaction of opposite-sex actors. These rules include, among other things, the following: 1) unmarried couples acting the part of a married couple are not allowed to sit on the same bed together; 2) unmarried actors are not allowed to be shown sitting in the same room together with the door closed; and 3) a father cannot be shown kissing his daughter, nor a mother her son, unless the actors themselves are so related (Boyd 1993, p. 159).

vincing reason to justify such praise. Unfortunately, even the most objective media are forced to spend much of their coverage on the everyday comings and goings of the ruling elite (Shanqiti 1986, p. 98). Not doing so would result in either overt or subtle coercion from the government.

In the Islamic model, media must retain their credibility, and the people's trust, if they are to play their role effectively. This would entail limiting the extent to which government can have direct control (the power to censor or shut down an enterprise) or indirect control (the power to delay crucial supplies and equipment or withhold government advertisements) over a particular media establishment. If the state is to play any direct role in media operations, that role should be to guarantee and defend the rights of all media groups to fair and unhindered competition in accessing the public. Also, in keeping with its responsibility to ensure the privacy and rights of all individuals, the government should have the authority to take action when any such individual rights are violated by the media.

Above and beyond this, all other aspects of the media should be self-regulated by the industry, and by the public. In keeping with the Islamic concept of *shūrā* (consultation), a regulatory council of qualified media specialists would be elected periodically (much like a school board). Such a council would be totally non-governmental and non-partisan and would act in lieu of the traditional Third-World "Ministry of Information." This media board would have vested authority to oversee all media operations and ensure compliance with Islamic methodology and content as discussed earlier. The media board would also be responsible for regulating imported media, and pushing for the development of local productions and talent.

Media-related matters such as industry disputes, the distribution of crucial resources, access to the broadcast spectrum, and cable rights would also fall under the jurisdiction of the board.[22] The government would be obligated to ensure fair elections for the board and, if necessary, to enforce its decisions. In addition, associations and guilds of media professionals (e.g., journalists, actors, producers, directors) might be formed to draw up standards and codes for their members to abide by. The guilds would be empowered to take action against those who violated the agreed-upon codes. Again, this is in keeping with the Islamic concept of *shūrā*, and the notion that a moral society is capable of self-regulation.

22. This role is similar to the one played in the U.S. by the Federal Communications Commission. However, it would not be susceptible to partisan influence.

As for the government awarding or withholding advertising as a means of controlling the media, again, the Islamic approach would be based upon cooperation among all parties. One option would be for each paper, magazine or broadcast operation to guarantee a certain amount of free space or time for government-placed messages or public service announcements. Since, generally speaking, such messages serve to benefit society, this approach would be in line with with the fundamental purpose of Islamic media. Also, such an approach would save taxpayers' money for other uses.

Media Economics

One issue that is certain to come up in discussing any media model is the question of how such an enterprise would be financed. As asserted earlier, neither the socialist model (in which the government directly finances all media) nor the capitalist model (in which the media's goal is to deliver an audience to advertisers) is totally compatible with the Islamic worldview.

Advertising, as a means of furthering commerce, and bringing new and perhaps necessary products to the public's attention, is not discouraged *per se*. What is discouraged, however, is the use of advertising as a blatantly "consumer-creating" enterprise. In many capitalist countries, advertising seeks to stimulate need artificially, and encourages extravagance. People are incited to consume what they would otherwise not want or even feel the need for. Additionally, when such an approach is applied in the Third World, the mostly indigent audience begins aspiring to a lifestyle that is beyond its means. In the process, dangerous illusions about the accessibility of certain products are created (el-Affendi 1993, p. 64). Consumerism as such contradicts Islamic values, which urge moderation and the avoidance of waste and unnecessary consumption.

Excessive dependency on advertising revenue, in many instances, also compromises the integrity of the media product being delivered. In an effort to maximize ratings (in effect, = advertising revenue), media material is forced to appeal to the "lowest common denominator" in audiences. The coherency of serious and educational programming is likewise compromised when material is punctuated every few minutes with a bombardment of commercials. Various sports have occasionally had their rules changed so as to provide more convenient breaks and interruptions to accommodate sponsor needs (el-Affendi 1993, p. 74).

In contrast to the "lowest common denominator" approach is the practice of some highbrow publications of targeting an elite readership to get the

type of ads that appeal to an affluent lifestyle. Such publications (e.g., *New Yorker* magazine) are occasionally forced to change their editorial policy and raise their prices, deliberately losing lower middle class and student readers so that they can keep ads targeted at a more affluent clientele (el-Affendi 1993, p. 54). Finally, dependency on sponsors has forced some media institutions to censor their own material when it offends advertisers or their corporate owners. Even if there are serious moral misgivings and evidence of wrongdoing on behalf of these groups, the wrongdoing is covered up or misrepresented to the public. All these elements of an advertising-dominated funding structure for media are essentially contradictory to many of the Islamic media goals and methods discussed in chapter three.

A funding structure appropriate to an Islamic model would be one that is co-dependent on business, government and the public, and in which the benefit and welfare of society come before all other concerns. In such a structure, no one sector would have an opportunity to exercise undue influence. For more costly media, such as broadcasting and cable TV, perhaps a three-tiered funding approach might be most advantageous. Funds would then come from: 1) the limited number of commercials shown; 2) the government, through an independent institution, perhaps similar to the United State's Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB); and 3) in the more affluent countries, from an annual license fee paid by owners of radio and TV sets, similar to the practice adopted in many Western European countries (Dominick 1987, p. 63). Some sort of rating system, based on viewership, quality, origin (local or imported) and diversity of programming could perhaps be devised to determine how much each operation receives. With regards to print media, one method by which dependency on advertisements could be decreased is indirect government subsidies to the media (e.g., cheaper mailing privileges, tax concessions), again, similar to what is practiced in several Western European countries (Dominick 1987, p. 63).

As for the advertisements that do appear in the various types of media, a few guidelines might be appropriate. Basically, ads should meet the methodology requirements established earlier in this chapter and in chapter three. To supplement these requirements, a code can be drawn up through the process of *shūrā* (consultation) that would further define and regulate advertising according to Islamic values. Again, such consultation should take place within an association of Muslim advertising agencies and professionals. A good example of this from Western media is the Creative Code developed by the American Association of Advertising Agencies.

The AAAA code defines the responsibilities of advertisers, ethical standards for truth in statements, visuals, price claims, comparisons and testimonials, the issue of public decency and, finally, actions to be taken against those violating the code (Hiebert 1985, p. 616). In the Islamic model, particular attention would be paid to the issue of consumerism. Restrictions would be placed on exploitation of any type, be it the promotion of goods that the population does not need or cannot afford, the promotion of goods and services that go against the public's health and welfare (tobacco and alcohol products, predatory law practices), or specific targeting of more vulnerable members of society (children, the elderly). To assure compliance with such a code, the advertising association would be recognized and empowered by the government to monitor and take action against any violations.

Since the concept behind advertising in the Islamic model is to fulfill the need for information about necessary products and their availability, and not to create needs, the placement and positioning of ads need not be done in such a manner that one is seized and coerced into watching. Commercials and print advertisements should be placed in such a manner as to convey their message with minimum intrusion into the subject matter being presented. For television and radio, this could mean bunching commercials together and broadcasting them at specified intervals during the day, perhaps every hour. For print media, advertisements could likewise be bunched up and printed at the end of the publication.

Media Ownership

A final issue, when discussing structure, is that of media ownership. In the spirit of free enterprise, Islam encourages private ownership of business and industry, including media institutions. The concern is, however, not to allow such ownership to become so concentrated or monopolized as to have undue influence over society's thoughts and opinions, or prevent other groups from competing fairly.

In the event that the number of players is naturally restricted, as is the case with broadcasting (the finite spectrum of broadcasting space allows for a limited number of radio and TV stations) and cable (limited to one company per region), the privilege to operate should be viewed as a form of public trust. The main criterion to be used in the evaluation of contenders is that of which can most benefit the community. Only after groups demonstrate that they have the experience and capacity to fill society's program-

ming needs, provide local and diverse programs, and adhere to the principles of an Islamic model, should they be awarded operating licenses. Also, in the interest of fair competition and opportunity, limits should be considered for the number of television and radio stations that any one group can own. Such operations might be reviewed periodically by the media board (proposed earlier), and in the case of non-performance, operating privileges could be revoked.

In poorer regions of the Muslim world, where no private interest can afford to own and operate a radio, television or cable station, public rather than government ownership would be the alternative. In such a situation, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) or the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, both government-chartered but publicly owned, might be good models to follow. In an Islamic model, media ownership would be totally local or at least locally owned to the extent of retaining control. This would ensure that the media be truly representative and in touch with their audiences, and with their best interests in mind, and could allow audiences to provide feedback and input to local owners. It would also preclude the media's being controlled by some remote multinational conglomerate, headquartered in a different part of the world, whose sole purpose is profit. It might be most economical if a number of independent, locally-owned media efforts networked together to share costs, information and material. Such a network, however, should be flexible enough to allow its members to retain their local identity, and also allow for the customizing of media to meet each community's particular needs. In the U.S., both National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) are good models to follow in this regard.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

Throughout most of the Third-World, Western society has come to represent the pinnacle of human achievement in the realms of science, technology, commerce, art, philosophy, and egalitarianism. However, what is seldom taken into account is the fact that in order to arrive at where it is now, Western society has had to undergo centuries of tumultuous change, conflict, trial and error, introspection and transformation. Only after such a long development and struggle was Western society capable of arriving at the identity and culture it now has. Many Third-World societies assume that by replicating existing Western models, which represent the culmination of this long and arduous process, they too can reap similar benefits and rewards. However, not having gone through the same defining experiences as the West, these Third-World societies are ill conditioned to adapt to these models. As a result, more often than not, the imported models deliver very little of what is expected of them, and in some situations do much damage to local society and culture.

The Islamic Alternative

The problems of Third World societies—the economy, the social inequality, the political and judicial systems, the people's self-image—require sustainable alternatives. Approaches and models need to be sought

from various sources and experimented with. One alternative that might prove effective is for these societies to look first into their own history and culture for clues as how to deal with the contemporary challenges they face. Only then should they seek to fill any remaining gaps by selecting and adapting particular elements of other models that coincide with and are harmonious with their unique character. For the Muslim portion of the Third-World, the primary identity that runs strong and has for centuries been deeply ingrained into daily life, is obviously the Islamic one. Therefore, any attempt at revitalizing Muslim-world institutions should begin by looking at that region's Islamic roots. The Muslim world has much potential to grow and prosper and play a productive role in the world scene. But first it must come to grips with its identity, history and self-image. This is the goal of present day Islamic revivalist movements.

This approach is especially crucial with regard to the institutions of the mass media, since media play a pivitol role in defining society's worldview and in creating a national identity. The principles proposed in this research, however crude and elementary, are submitted as broad guidelines and perhaps points for debate to crack the door open along this line of inquiry. Hopefully, such a media model would afford Muslim populations the proper education and tools to analyze the various messages being received. In so doing, they will finally be able to discard the remaining vestiges of repressive colonialism and corrupt rule. This will enable the ordinary Muslim to discern among propaganda, culturally compatible and value reinforcing messages, and culturally alien, negative and obtrusive influences. By reverting to the Qur'an and Sunnah as sources for this model, the study hopes to provide a holistic and therefore more harmonious system.

It is hoped also that with such a model, Muslim states can become competitive and productive on the global scene because they will have media that truly express their culture, self-image and values. Instead of being magnets for imported programs and culture, Muslims will be able instead to export some of their own ethical and moral contributions to other media systems.

What is also essential to point out is that when we speak of an Islamic model we do not mean to do away with all that has been achieved in the West as far as the media are concerned. Rather, we will make use of many elements—while replacing some aspects of the style, content, and methodology so that they can convey an Islamic spirit. This is not an attack on the West nor its ideology, but rather a statement that the Muslim world has

gone through some very different experiences and trials, and as a result has a unique identity from which solutions to its problems must stem. The Western models are more suited to the audiences they address because they share a common worldview. We propose the same for the Muslim world.

The Scope of the Islamic Media Model

The proposed model is necessarily theoretical and intellectual in nature. As a whole, it cannot be tested, refined, or achieve any of its its purported goals in isolation. It must operate from within a total Islamic state. This means that all institutions in society—political, economic and social—need to be Islamized so that a coherent, holistic Islamic system is in place. Only then can an Islamic media model be "plugged in" to play its role effectively. Therefore, the proposed Muslim media model must remain theoretical, until the right pre-conditions are in existence. For any of this to work, we are presupposing a conscientious society that wants it, and is willing to support, govern and enforce it.

Notwithstanding this, certain aspects of this model could be adapted for use by contemporary independent media efforts. Specifically, producers could incorporate some Islamic elements into their entertainment, educational, and news programming. Also, certain production elements could be refined without too much expense or effort.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research is intended to serve as an initial building block or "foot in the door" for much more detailed and intensive study needed in the field of alternative media models. The research itself has pointed to other areas that will require further inquiry in order for a more well-rounded Islamic media model to evolve.

One area that requires further research is the study of other forms of mass media—print media, film, the recording and publishing industries. Do these all fall under the same general model presented here, or do they require more specific guidelines?

Also, future in-depth studies need to be done on issues relating to media structure, regulation and control. The economic issues—how will mass media be financed, and what limitations should be put on their control—need much additional research.

Another area needing further research, and which indirectly relates to the issue of limitations, is that of media criticism. Like any other institution, if the media are not checked and made responsive to competitive pressures they will inevitably slide into mediocrity. Further research would determine the general form such feedback mechanisms might take in the light of Islamic etiquette and methodology. Both popular and academic criticism, internal and external, need to be brought into play. Is there a need for an ombudsman, and precisely what role would he play?

An area not touched upon in this study is that of possible audience reaction to the proposed media model. Since Muslim audiences are very diverse in their cultures and in their interpretation of Islam as it pertains to daily life, any attempt to gauge or anticipate audience response would necessarily require additional, more focused research and fieldwork. This would ultimately demonstrate the effectiveness of this model.

The diversity of the audience requires that future studies focus also on the issue of pluralism within the media model. What would be the mechanisms to safeguard the rights of minorities, which exist in nearly every Muslim-majority state. How are minority cultures and languages to be represented fairly in the media model?

Another issue for further study, but also one which could be implemented concurrently with a Muslim media model, is that of teaching this new approach, and revising the media curricula in the education institutions of Muslim nations. Special educational seminars could be prepared for commentators, hosts, anchors and program directors to imbue their professional work with a deeper Islamic understanding. This would be done with the intention of making them more aware and conscious of the Islamic perspective, so as to be more compatible with the majority of their viewers.

This is in line with the need to encourage young Muslims to get involved in the media and to study them (there is a dire need for Muslim creative directors, writers, and producers). Those trained within the Islamic model could be supported by the creation of guilds, associations and organizations that promote Islamic media and the training of this type of professional. These organizations would in turn establish international conferences devoted to the discussion and development of cinema, TV, radio, drama,

etc. around the Muslim world. Finally, with this greater exposure of the Islamic media model, investors will be encouraged to put money into creating production houses and companies while investing in the TV and film industry.

Islam, by its very nature, is a religion of law and order. This is reflected in the general attitude it maintains towards society's institutions. Through such a balanced system, Islam aims to establish peace and tranquility within society, in the home, and within the individual conscience. However, when taken to an extreme, this very emphasis on law and order, instead of being a stabilizing factor, can stifle and paralyze all creativity and initiative.

Mass media, which are crucial to the survival and viability of society in this day and age, must nevertheless submit to some rules and regulations. But the process through which such rules and regulations can be revised must always remain accessible to society. In translating the original Islamic texts into practical, contemporary guidelines for media work, I had to make some innovative and individualistic interpretations. This work, however, cannot be viewed as conclusive, since the texts are always open to new and different interpretations. Claiming any such conclusiveness would deny the very factors that made this work possible. Flexibility of this sort is a necessary safeguard to allow for constant revision of the Islamic media model, so that it can keep pace with the ever-changing societal and technological environment. The challenge now is whether Muslim society will avail itself of this flexibility, and develop its own vital and dynamic media model, or remain entrenched in old traditions and approaches, leaving for itself no alternative but dependency on imported, and incompatible, media models.

Addendum

During January of 1994, I had the opportunity to tour a number of countries in the Muslim world and assess the viability of producing media based on an Islamic worldview. I met with numerous Muslim directors, producers and other media professionals in order to elicit their understanding of what the form and function of Islamic media should be. The countries visited have reasonably free media, and producers are afforded considerable liberty in program design.

In the case of Iran and Turkey, both of which have had an established, respectable secular film industry since the sixties, talented directors and producers are re-focusing their energies towards meeting the increasing demand for more Islamic productions. Since the revolution, Iranian law has mandated certain Islamic guidelines for film and television. This legislation initially resulted in an influx of revolutionary, ideologically- and Jihad-oriented pictures (especially during the eight-year war with Iraq). However, as the country returned to normalcy, films again started addressing issues of everyday life.

Today, Islamic directors in Iran have in many ways been able to attain the same international recognition they enjoyed in pre-revolutionary times. More recently, in Turkey and Malaysia (as both countries experience a public, institutionalized Islamic resurgence), the demand for Islamic programming has grown significantly. This has resulted in a sharp increase in Islamic production houses. Fortunately, this increased competition is bringing about an improvement in production standards, and creating a more discerning audience.

Throughout the Muslim world there is considerable talent and variety in the fields of television and film production. There are many capable Muslim directors, producers, script-writers and other media specialists.

However, these experts remain isolated from one another, and this isolation represents an immense drain of resources. Each and every production effort inevitably faces similar obstacles, challenges, and severely limited financing. As a result, although individuals are talented, productions are usually underfunded and mediocre. Techniques that one director might have developed for representing certain Islamic concepts on screen will go unnoticed by other directors in the world who are struggling to do the same. Much effort is wasted in creating almost identical shows (about Hajj, *Ṣalāt*, the Qur'an, Islamic history) rather than having each director or region concentrate on one aspect that would complement what others are doing elsewhere.

The fact that most Islamic programs, once produced, are rarely ever distributed or shown outside the country that produced them, severely reduces the revenue-generating potential of the programs and makes them a less attractive investment. Many Islamic countries would rather import the bulk of their programming from the U.S. and other Western countries than support one another's production efforts.

This isolation from one another of the various efforts also fosters widely differing notions as to what Islamic media should be like. Some directors regard Islamic media productions as being only material that deals specifically with Islam, its history and teachings, or a particular article of faith. Thus, you find "Islamic" children's shows that continuously dwell on topics like prayer, fasting and Hajj rather than general and more relevant real-life issues.

Other directors, when portraying something Islamic, adopt a very rigid and formal approach. Such "Islamic" dramas contain heroes that are extremely and unrealistically hyper-religious and over-righteous. These characters walk and talk in the most grandiose manner. Villains, on the other hand, are portrayed as being so intensely evil and vile as to be almost comical. Sets, in the zeal to be hyper-Islamic, are likewise grand and artificial looking. This approach effectively obliterates any aspect of "humanness" from the drama and causes it to be very stiff and removed from the viewer.

At the other extreme, there are directors that portray normal, every-day life (as practiced in their region) and throw in some general values and a few cultural elements, and regard that as being "Islamic." Such shows often depict characters struggling with romantic relationships, triangles and conspiracies of various sorts. In the end, it is only the virtuous and "sincere"

who prevail and live happily ever after. Directors might have women dress in traditional garb (as opposed to Western-style clothing) and suppose that they are "Islamically" dressed, while in fact the clothing would not be considered Islamic according to mainstream Muslim sensibilities.

Overwhelmingly, most media professionals believe that Islamic media are those that merely replace secular content with Islamic content, while the production methodology remains the same. And, as with any new frontier, there remain in the minds of almost all Islamic directors many unresolved and controversial issues such as the use of professional (non-Islamic) vs. Muslim actors, the portrayal of affection between men and women, women shown wearing *hijab* in their own homes vs. a realistic portrayal, the use of music, and other issues. These and many more such questions will doubtless continue to present themselves to individual directors struggling to define this field.

Almost all of the individuals I met with echoed the need for the creation of a forum to bring together Islamic media professionals. In order for Islamic media to mature as a viable alternative to mainstream fare, many seminars and conferences need to be held to develop a common and deeper understanding of Islamic media and its approaches, limitations, philosophy and techniques. Such a forum would give media professionals wider exposure to each other's works and talents, and would facilitate cooperation to enhance and improve what is produced with the meager resources available. Such a forum would also serve as a conduit for the wider distribution of productions from various parts of the Muslim world.

Finally, the following is a brief description of one of the many outstanding examples I have come across, of infusing a new and dynamic Islamic sensibility into media production. Such efforts hold much promise, and can be used as models for others attempting to brave this new frontier of Islamic media activism. We pray that Allah bless and guide all efforts towards what is righteous; Amīn.

Primetime

Primetime's offices are located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Br. Muhammad Salleh Kassim, the executive chairman, emphasizes his commitment to the notion of Islamic and value-based programming. His company, Primetime, is an independent production company that contracts to produce programs for various stations and clients. Presently, Primetime's major productions are two current affairs shows that it produces for TV3

Malaysia (a privately-owned broadcasting operation). According to Br. Kassim, his is the only production company among the 200-300 in Malaysia that produces current affairs shows. Primetime also produces for Radio-Television Malaysia (RTM) on a part-time basis, in addition to other specials.

The two shows that are produced for TV3 are:

Dari Bskl. This Friday night show is in the Malay language, and is 22 minutes long. Dari Bskl deals with understanding the economy in general, and often deals with Islamic concepts such as Islamic Banking, Waqf and Zakat. Each show is divided into five timely, fast-paced and diverse segments of about 2–7 minutes each. Each episode features on-site reports that highlight various industries, as well as interviews with professors and business professionals.

Aldin. Another fast-paced program that attempts to educate the public on religious and moral issues. It is in Malay, is 22 minutes long and is shown every Friday morning at 11:30. Each episode of *Aldin* is divided into 3 segments. The first is always on a "topic of the week" highlighting a currently relevant issue and analyzing it from an Islamic perspective. The second segment is called "Guidance," and its goal is to increase the viewers' Islamic knowledge and education. It is usually done in a question-and-answer format in which a traditional religious scholar (geared towards rural viewers) and a university professor or Islamic activist (for urban viewers) are asked for their opinion regarding particular Islamic practices and beliefs. The third segment concerns "culture," and attempts to advise viewers on proper morals, behavior, etiquette, and daily interaction. Issues such as the proper way to treat one's neighbors, smoking, and work ethics are treated in a variety of interesting ways. One method is the use of mini-dramatizations that are amusing but to the point, to convey a message of what is the proper and improper way of behaving in certain situations.

Aldin is one of the few shows on Malaysian TV that is openly Islamic. Because of its fast-paced and varied format and its emphasis on current issues, it has become a popular show among Malays. One drawback, however, is its being shown on Friday mornings. This time-slot severely restricts its viewership primarily to housewives, since everyone else is either at work or preparing for *Jum'a* prayer at that time. Serious consideration is being given to this matter by TV3, and there is a high probability that *Aldin* will be moved to a better (perhaps prime-time) slot.

Aldin researchers get their topics by skimming various newspapers and magazines. An effort is made to avoid extremely controversial issues in order not to create a stir. Radical or controversial speakers are not featured on the show. Also, no effort is made to have the show accredited by, or be seen as affiliated with, any particular Islamic group such as ABIM (aside from the occasional interview with ABIM leaders), because these groups would eventually try to control and influence such shows.

For each of its two regular shows, Primetime has established a separate production unit made up of its own researchers and producers. However, the technical crew used, as well as the studios and editing facilities, are all those of TV3. Ultimately, TV3 owns all rights for the two shows. The producer of each show researches various materials to come up with episodes that have an Islamic angle but are appealing to non-Muslims as well. This is done, with regard to *Aldin* in particular, by emphasizing universal values. *Aldin* is also being sold to Brunei for broadcast there as well.

For certain occasions, such as Ramaḍan, Mawlid ul-Rasool and Hajj, Primetime is often contracted to produce relevant specials for TV3. One such special, on 'Id al-Fitr, shows how preparations for 'Id are made in various places in Malaysia, and this is then contrasted with the suffering in Bosnia, and interviews with Bosnian refugees in Malaysia as they too remember and prepare for the 'Id. The goal behind this production was to remind viewers, in this time of happiness, of other less fortunate Muslims who continue to suffer.

One pioneering aspect of TV3's *Aldin* program is that its principal producer is a woman, Sr. Ḥamisah Ẓaharah Ḥasan, and that the host of the program is also a woman, who appears on camera in full Islamic *hijab*. Up to now, no other TV3 program has had an Islamically dressed woman as a host, nor does RTM allow any Islamically dressed women as hosts for any of its programs. This is due to the perception that women dressed in such a manner are less educated, and also to the claim these stations make of not wanting to impose Islam on the audience.

Currently under production at Primetime are pilot episodes for a third series aimed at children. Each episode of this series consists of a number of sketches featuring an assortment of puppets. Various universal values and morals are emphasized through the sketches, most of which revolve around the environment and its preservation. A production crew of five, hired to create this program, is responsible for all its aspects, including making the puppets and set, writing the scripts, and final production.

Primetime and its founder, Br. Muhammad Salleh Kassim, are a very good example of a dynamic and innovative production company that is oriented towards producing Islamic-value programming. Operating in the relative openness of the Malaysian media environment, they have been pioneers in creating exciting and attractive formats, and in presenting Islamic concepts to educated and uneducated viewers alike.

Some of the segments produced for Primetime's two shows, as well as some of the documentaries and puppet sketches, are not time-related or specifically oriented towards Malay culture. Therefore, these productions are good candidates for dubbing and distribution elsewhere in the Muslim world. One format worth investigating would be the creation of an international video magazine (for broadcast). Each episode would consist of many short (current affairs or *60 Minutes*-style) segments from all over the Muslim world. Primetime and similar Muslim producers located elsewhere (e.g., Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, USA) would contribute segments already produced for other purposes (such as *Aldin* and *Dari Bskl*). All the producer of such a magazine would need to do, at relatively low cost, would be to dub the material, assemble it, and provide adequate transitions. Such a production would be exciting, and very diversified, and would provide excellent exposure to Muslim audiences about what is happening elsewhere in the Ummah. Also, such a production would provide international exposure for many independent producers in various countries, as well as additional revenue for material they have already produced.

Primetime has already established itself as a reputable supplier of programs for the main Malaysian TV networks (RTM and TV3). Therefore, they could be a good conduit or middleman for the importation of Islamic-oriented programming from other parts of the Muslim world for broadcast on Malaysian TV.

Finally, it is often much cheaper for U.S. or European producers to produce certain types of programs using overseas facilities and talent. Primetime, because of its location in the Third World, and its high production standards and Islamic-minded approach, would be an excellent company to contract with to produce, at one-third cost, programs needed for the U.S. and European Muslim communities. Also, because Primetime already has a setup for an elaborate puppet show, they are receptive to the idea of being sent scripts from overseas producers to produce children's programs.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Research in Islamic media is still in its infancy, especially in English. This book, presented by IIIT to the students of Islamization of knowledge, is a recent contribution to this great civilizational project.

It deals with the communication media in the Muslim world, and compares the international Islamic view to the contemporary media views. It also presents a set of practical principles upon which a model of Islamic communication through media can be based. The book ends with recommendations and research project proposals for the future in the area of Islamic media.

It is a real accumulation of knowledge in communication sciences from an Islamic perspective.